

INDIGENOUS PEOPLES

Responding to Human Ecology

Lachman M. Khubchandani



CENTRAL INSTITUTE OF INDIAN LANGUAGES

&

bhasha

BHASHA RESEARCH & PUBLICATION CENTRE

Indigenous Peoples: Responding to Human Ecology

by Lachman M. Khubchandani

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Dedicated to

Ganesh Devy

founder of the Bhasha movement,

my friend, philosopher and guide

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Foreword

During the last academic year, the Central Institute of Indian Languages (CIIL) had offered a substantial grant to Bhasha Research Centre for a set of four books, which are now ready to be published. These are -

1. *Tribal Literature of Gujarat* by Nishaant Choksi
2. *Manda Oral Literature* by B. Ramakrishna Reddy
3. *Manda-English Dictionary* by B. Ramakrishna Reddy
4. *Indigenous Peoples: Responding to Human Ecology* by Lachman M. Khubchandani

Although the Government of India and especially the Ministry of HRD can create an academic environment conducive to application-oriented research, it cannot force its agenda on the research academies and bodies, sincere and dedicated professionals. Many of them want to help the smaller communities solve their problems in the sectors of health, education, preservation and promotion of cultural heritage and related social problems. The materials produced have to be sensitive to the legitimate needs of the individuals and communities with which they work. This is exactly what is being done by Bhasha, Baroda. Earlier, CIIL collaborated with them in bringing out pictorial glossaries and other materials in a large number of Bhili dialects.

Among the books being published, the importance of a dictionary is undeniable. With the advent of literature, words acquired new meanings as well as usage. To help readers to have an entry into the world of unknown words, the publication of dictionaries is essential. Since many tribal regional languages have started producing literature these days, an introduction to all of them from Gujarat is very useful. Similarly, orality keeps the debate on in literary circles, and to that extent the work on Manda oral literature is particularly welcome. The last of these is a treatise by Professor

Khubchandani, who has been at the forefront of tribal studies for the last fifty years, and is an untiring crusader for the tribal cause. In that respect, his work on *Human Ecology* is extremely important.

What are the challenges for a Tribal Languages researcher in India? In many cases, the tribal habitats are inaccessible and almost one-third of them still live below the poverty line. Consequently, hunger and prolonged fight with day-to-day adversities take precedence over education as effects of development are either lacking or are sub-standard. Abject poverty of these people compounds the problem. And yet, they are creative and culturally sensitive, and may even turn out to be more civilised than the so-called civil society. The situation has vastly improved after 'Tribal Affairs' received a special focus and a special ministry was set up and the sectoral programmes, such as health, education, poverty alleviation, women & child development etc., are looked after by the concerned Central Ministry that continues to administer its programmes.

CIL has always been active in the field of tribal and border languages, and is engaged in endangered languages research these days. This is not something that can be achieved by one institution alone, no matter what its funding for such activities would be. The main dearth is in the human resource that is in plenty with organisations such as Bhasha. This is what makes the collaboration worthwhile. I am sure that research scholars, faculty, government officials as well as common readers would like these books, and will send us their feedback to improve upon these texts in later editions. More importantly, these books are going to be acceptable by all those who are members of these communities. That will give us all a great satisfaction.

II

In 1989, a period during which I was facing an acute trauma and was on the verge of mental breakdown, I decided to participate in a seminar on Translation Studies held in Bombay as a therapeutic exercise. As I was an uninvited participant, and more importantly uninterested in the discussion, I sat through the proceedings quietly. I found practically every presentation bankrupt of insights and mostly cliché-ridden. Only one presentation attracted my attention, not for its scholarly depth – which it had in reasonable degree – but for the acuteness of its political imagination. I had not previously known the professor who made that presentation and, therefore, I made no effort to express my admiration for his presentation. It was he who took the initiative, insisted that we exchange addresses and encouraged me to speak in the last session of the seminar. I did so out of politeness. I have always been a poor manager of visiting cards; and I knew that this card too would soon be lost among other cards I had lost long ago.

Ten years later as I was sorting out my academic papers mainly with the intention of destroying them, I came across the address I had noted. Somewhat instinctively I decided not to put it away but to activate the contact. Thus I wrote a brief letter to Prof. Lachman Khubchandani at his Pune address, requesting him to join my colleagues and me at Saputara for launching the first ever printed text in the Kunkna language spoken in the forested district of Dangs. Prof. Khubchandani obliged. The Kunkna text which was a magazine called *Dhol* was launched by him on a full moon evening at the village Morzira. Nearly 1500 adivasis had gathered to hear what Prof. Khubchandani had to say. I had secretly feared that he might bring in a lot of linguistics in what he said. He surprised me and thrilled the entire audience by speaking eloquently in the simplest Hindustani for a full thirty-five minutes. His lecture

involved an explanation of the intimate relationship between *loka-jeevan* and *loka-gnan*, between life as it is lived and the knowledge foundation on which it is based. I realised that the political imagination that had struck me in Prof. Khubchandani's Bombay presentation had deepened, creating an entire worldview in which he had presented a theory of justice based on language. I found the formulation far more alluring than any socio-linguistic treatise that I had studied previously.

My adivasi colleagues at Saputara requested that they would like to have more of Khubchandani discourse. So we decided to put him on the permanent list of invitees at the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre. The Adivasi Academy, Tejgadh was established in 1999. When the question of inviting a group of philosophers to constitute the Board of Advisors came up, I pleaded with Prof. Khubchandani that he be the Chairperson of the Board. With a lot of hesitation but with an equal degree of warmth he accepted the invitation. He contributed very significantly in laying the foundation of the 'pedagogy of the oppressed' that we had been developing at the Adivasi Academy. During the Gujarat riots a slight difference of opinion was beginning to emerge between some of my colleagues and Prof. Khubchandani; but I also noticed that Prof. Khubchandani had woven in his worldview a thoroughly Gandhian sense of 'meaningfulness'. That provided us a certain safety net for keeping our collective work in good progress.

We decided at this stage that enough was not enough, and that we must create a larger group of younger linguists who can bring their skills to the study of adivasi languages. Therefore, under Prof. Khubchandani's stewardship we launched *Bhasha Manthan*, a three year symposium event. The result however was not as expected, it was rather somewhat unexpected. Not many young linguists came forward to join us as expected; but unexpectedly, quite a range of young adivasi thinkers became

attracted to socio-linguistics. These included Subhash Ishai (Rathwi), Subhash Pavra (Pavri), Dhirubhai Patel (Kunkna), Vikram Chaudhari (Chaudhari) and Chanakya (Saora). Moreover, a young visiting scholar from Chicago, Nishaant Choksi and already established scholars like C. C. Rathwa (Dehwali) and Bhagwandas Patel (Dungri Bhili) became great admirers of Prof. Khubchandani's brilliant insights.

The method of lecturing he developed at Adivasi Academy did not conform to any established mode of discourse in the contemporary academic world. It was more like the Socratic dialogue. Normally, Prof. Khubchandani would arrive at the Academy and open the conversation with the customary "*aap kaise hain*"? But unlike the customary practice, he did not terminate the conversation with the respondent merely offering a perfunctory 'fine'. Rather, Prof. Khubchandani continued the dialogue beginning with whatever object or event came at hand to talk about, and then developed it to a highly refined discussion of culture, society and language, gathering around him in the meanwhile an impressive battery of admiring students and colleagues. This was his school.

I noticed that these conversations were not being recorded. So I requested Prof. Khubchandani if he would accept a modest Fellowship for a somewhat steady affiliation with the Adivasi Academy. I had feared that he would decline the offer as, in those years, he was constantly being invited at high-station seminars and meetings in various continents. But to everybody's delight he accepted the offer, came to Baroda, stayed in the very simple accommodation we provided him and undertook a somewhat impossible task of reproducing his insightful conversations. At that particular period of time, Mrs. Khubchandani was not keeping good health, and she was stationed at Pune. While Prof. Khubchandani had to make frequent trips to Pune to look after her, he did not bring the fatigue caused in his way of pursuing his intellectual task. His

time in Baroda, I imagine was dreary, the only relief being an occasional conversation with other Bhasha Fellows such as Dr. Brian Coates and Mrs. Eileen Coates or Prof. Jayandra Soni and Prof. Geoffrey Davis. But he continued the work untiringly.

The monograph, I may say one of the finest in the range of socio-linguistic work on Indian *bhashas*, is the result of Prof. Khubchandani's works at the Adivasi Academy and Bhasha Research Centre. Its greatest virtue is that it looks at language as a continually dynamic formation and not as a placid verbal accretion. For me it is a matter of great honour that Prof. Khubchandani with his characteristic generosity has dedicated the work to me and has described me as the founder of the Bhasha movement. Just in order to set the record right, I would like to add that I am merely a co-founder of the movement in which Prof. Khubchandani's untiring energy has been the driving engine. I am delighted that through the publication of this monograph, Prof. Khubchandani's insightful analysis of language change is becoming available to scholars outside the Adivasi Academy.

Baroda
1.03.09

G. N. Devy
Founder Trustee, Bhasha

Introduction

For many decades now tribal communities in independent India have been at the receiving end of 'development'. There has been a growing feeling, particularly among the *adivasis*, that various programmes of development generally upsetting their lifestyles have not been as effective in terms of their societal and cultural upliftment. Adivasi communities continue to be made easy targets of exploitation through 'mainstream' interventions in the name of development; they have only been "robbed of their songs, their dances, their festivals and their laughter".

Tribal society is not as stagnant as has been perceived by many social scientists. The present study is a compendium of the author's earlier work (1992), which focused on specific socio-cultural indicators namely literacy and urbanisation, signifying the directions of continuity and change among Indian tribals. In the pervasive climate of development, configurations of traditional and modernising milieus are bound to affect one another. This enquiry addresses the developmental crisis in the larger framework of human ecology; on how the indigenous peoples, rooted to the soil, respond to such phenomena.

The first section of the monograph, "Perspectives" deals with the following perspectives of indigenous people on a universal plane:

- viewing nature as a companion, instead of treating nature as a commodity;
- Perceiving language, *bhasha*, as an ongoing process in everyday life communication that remains in a state of becoming; and
- regarding local knowledge as a relational construct, constantly negotiated and adopting new forms everyday.

Such a worldview needs to be empathised as a 'humane' enterprise; it cannot entirely rule out a degree of subjectivity in characterising the spectrum of human civilisation (cf. Table 1).

There has been an ongoing debate among social scientists regarding the merits of being an 'insider' or an 'outsider' while studying various aspects of human behaviour. It is generally believed that 'insiders' romanticise the assets of "only the wearer knows where the shoe pinches", and 'outsiders' emphasise the predicament that "one can hardly get out of one's own skin". This predicament leads us to view the entire spectrum of human civilisation in more synergic terms.

Under the Indian Constitution, various communities of indigenous peoples have been identified as "Scheduled Tribes". There are nearly four hundred such groups that comprise over eight percent of India's population. This study dwells upon the processes and manifestations of the tribal worldview, resources available to them, their social organisation and aesthetic fabric. It attempts to assess the relevance of tribal ethos as reflecting the Gandhian concept of Trusteeship in contemporary times (Chapter 1).

Discussing the issue of globalisation, the 'local' and the 'global' are viewed as two sides of the same coin, complementing rather than competing with each other. The particular and the universal are compared with complementary functions, similar to bi-focal glasses focusing on near-sighted and far-sighted objects. The rubric of indigenous knowledge systems is reviewed in relation to the functions of socio-cultural development and education (Chapter 3).

Tribal communities are by and large associated with oral cultures. It is, in a way, paradoxical that uncritical pursuit of modernisation in the contemporary world promulgates our current perception of literacy as the universal truth. Literate societies seem to be circumscribed by the myth of treating language as a 'crystallised entity' – an autonomous system –

with its distinct history and tradition. Qualities of language in a literary creation are quite different from those required in actual communication. In a way, a literary creation comes closest to being regarded as an 'artifact', a 'well-knit' entity. Issues of language endangerment are viewed in the context of language as 'code', crystallised within a language boundary. This notion guides the 'developing' world in its drive towards modernisation, just as it accepts many other institutions and values from the 'developed' world while attempting to transform the politico-economic and technological patterns of its own societies (Chapter 2).

Section Two, "Realities", discusses the issue of comprehending plurality in the Indian subcontinent, conducive to flexible boundaries and multiple identities. Tribals in India represent an exemplary case of amalgamative perception, a cultural synthesis transcending the language families, Austric, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian and Indo-Aryan (as in Jharkhand).

The study provides evidence of 'collective reality' among diverse tribal groups in a communitarian space: (a) represented by areas of convergence, such as Gondwana, Bhilbhoomi in Central India, tracing the histories of different language families, co-existing with blended features through open-ended transfers labelled as 'grassroots Aryanisation'; (b) developing super-layered *diglossia* of ancestral and dominant regional languages, and *polycentric* languages to mark differential identities; (c) showing respect for liaison among tribals and non-tribals by evolving *lingua francas* such as Sadani in the Central belt and Nagamese in the North-East (Chapter 4).

The study depicts the saga of the tribals' perpetual struggles and their tenacity to survive in the face of discrimination from the more powerful sections of society over the centuries. Such accounts testify to the *tribal pathos* – their suffering, oppression, humiliation and exploitation for centuries at the hands of super-ordinate groups – be they be feudal or

colonial powers, high-caste Hindus, missionaries, money lenders, developments agents or the creamy layer among tribals themselves having an attitude of patronising condescension (Chapter 5).

The precious heritage of tribals is portrayed by the state-wise dispersal of major communities and languages presented in decadal Censuses during the period 1961-2001. This account recapitulates and updates the tribal landscape earlier described in the author's 1992 study that was confined up to the 1981 Census. Multilingual and multicultural composition of tribal areas presents an interesting picture of vacillation and assertion of language identities among tribals to adjust with the changing times (Chapter 6).

During the post-colonial phase a plethora of explicit corporate provisions of legislative hierarchy, termed as 'language engineering' has resulted into a radical shift in language identity. This marks an upsurge away from a low-key *instrumental* role to the top-gear *defining* characteristic in the new order of pluralism. In addressing the issue of development, linguists and language planning professionals in India and in other countries have hitherto been siding with elitist orientations while profiling 'standard' languages, an endeavour closer to 'sophistic' fine arts. Whereas language visionaries, to name a few, Rabindranath Tagore, Balgangadhar Tilak, Mahatma Gandhi, C. Rajagopalachari, Jawaharlal Nehru and B. R. Ambedkar in the Indian context, acknowledged the pulse of the masses, perceived language as an everyday life activity and recognised the transactive gratification of those participating in diversified speech events, a skill closer to 'grassroots' folk crafts.

The study aims at re-assessing the development targets and strategies in the light of tribal perception. An integral and holistic approach should facilitate opening of avenues of participation at the grassroots level respecting the continuities

of heritage and avoiding the pitfalls of conceiving development as a rupture in tradition.

This monograph was conceptualised during my decade long association with the Bhasha Research and Publication Centre that is engaged in creating awareness among tribals through voluntary work and participatory programmes in villages of Gujarat. The study took a concrete shape when I got an opportunity to spend six months at the Bhasha Centre at Vadodara during 2006-07 under the first Research Fellowship Programme of the Adivasi Academy at Tejgadh. Later the study underwent some revisions when I was on visiting assignments at Portland State University, Oregon, and at the ELTIS Symbiosis International University, Pune.

I dedicate this study to Prof. Ganesh Devy, my friend, philosopher, and guide and the founder of the *Bhasha* movement. Prof. Devy's vision and dedicated efforts have significantly transformed, in a short span of time, tribal life in many villages in the eastern belt of Gujarat. I am gratified to my colleagues Dr. Brian Coates, Ms. Eileen Coates and Dr. Bhagwandas Patel for their fellowship and help when I was working on this research.

I also express my gratitude to my friend Prof. S. B. Mujumdar whose enlightened leadership has made Symbiosis a unique educational complex, cultivating excellence and promoting international co-operation, and who made available necessary facilities for my research. My sincere thanks also go to Sonal Baxi and Asif Malek at Vadodara and to Suruchi Khadilkar and Jyotsna Parmar at ELTIS, SIU Pune, for their enthusiastic support in giving this manuscript a final shape.

Lachman M. Khubchandani

PERSPECTIVES

Nature and Nurture

Clash of Worldviews*

The choice before us is between seeing the human race as a *part* of nature or as *apart* from nature; between a bottom-up shared view or a top-down totalitarian view; and a conservationist and a sustainable life-saving Gandhian approach, or an out-and-out consumerist and unsustainable destructive approach.

(Khoshoo 1995)

Many 'primeval' groups, popularly known as 'indigenous peoples' across the globe, show resilience of survival and continuity in face of the challenges posed by the contemporary technological milieu. These groups primarily depend upon the ecosystems in which they live. In this sense, they are essentially *ecosystem people* (Khoshoo 1995: 59).

In the Indian context, such groups, largely scattered and isolated from the larger population, are classified as 'tribals.' These groups, comprising over eight percent of the total population, can be portrayed with a unique profile of unity along with individual dignity (and variety) under different ecological conditions, and through diverse historical processes and human creativity (cf. Chapter 5). Altogether, 370 tribal groups are listed in different State Schedules in accordance with the provisions of the Indian Constitution (named 'Scheduled Tribes', for details, see Khubchandani

* A revised version of the study was presented at the seminar 'Save Ganga Movement: An Environment Mission', New Delhi, October 2004; it is published in *Gandhi Ganga Giriraj*. 2006. ed. L.M. Khubchandani, Ahmedabad: Navjeevan Publishing House.

1992). These are unevenly dispersed in approximately 530 districts, of the total 584 districts (as per 2001 Census), and are found to be creatively responding to the onslaughts of modernisation.

Tribal Consciousness

A distinct self-conceptualisation of tribals in the context of natural, social and historical processes is referred to as ‘tribal consciousness’ – mutual knowledge in distinguishing groups, *self* from the *other*. This consciousness pervades the tribal ethos throughout India. Roy Burman describes these communities as self-sufficient, unstratified and culturally homogenous: “(they) until recently maintained practically autogenous sources of legitimation of cultural and social processes” (1989).

Tribals have a strong sense of a distinct identity. This is generally expressed by attributing an ‘in-group’ label to their members and the mother tongue spoken by them. They call themselves by words which literally mean ‘us, men, people’. In the North-East the generic label *naga* can be traced to the term *nok* ‘people’, the Mikirs of Assam are known as *arlung* ‘man’, the Garos of Meghalaya are *mande* ‘man’, and the Kachari tribes in the Assam valley call themselves *boro* ‘man’.

In the Chotanagpur region in Jharkhand, a tribe called Ho means “people”; the Santals are known as *hor* ‘people’, in Munda language *horo* signifies ‘people’, they are often referred to as *horoko*; the tribe Koru means ‘men’, *kor* meaning ‘man’, and *-ku* is the plural suffix. The tribe Birhor comprised of *bir* ‘jungle’ and *hor* ‘people’, ‘the jungle people’.

A sense of peoplehood seems to be emerging among the tribals in India in the midst of distinct socio-cultural identities, ethnic and regional dimensions. A communitarian self-understanding, transcending the segmental

sociolinguistic identities, is being linked with tribal consciousness in several compact regions such as Jharkhand, Gondwana, Bhilbhoomi in the central belt and Mizoram, Nagaland, Arunachal and Bodoland in the North-East.

Over the past few decades since Independence, the tribal consciousness in relation to its own tradition and history as well as in relation to others, has been acquiring a sharp edge as an important feature of the subaltern dialectic in a plural milieu. It therefore becomes imperative to utilise this consciousness by extending and creating avenues of participation among tribals through which all that is valuable in tribal society, culture, language and the arts can be preserved, strengthened and developed.

In a universal perspective when taking into account the dynamics of persistence and change in tribal identities in general, and in their language behaviour in particular, throughout the world, one notices a significant shift from the earlier view of tribe as “a simplistic social formation in the evolutionary scheme”. This is replaced by social formations of a higher order. Roy Burman suggests a new approach of treating tribe as “a distinct type of social formation with elements of perpetuity in diverse technological contexts” (*op. cit.*), emerging from a worldview of cognitive continuum from ‘*self*’ to ‘*cosmos*’.

Tribal Ethos

We discuss here some of the processes and manifestations of the tribal worldview, the resources available to them, their social organisation and aesthetic fabric, under the rubric of tribal ethos. We dwell upon understanding the ‘tribal psyche’ in more objective terms, identifying the primal characteristics of such societies in relation to nature and nurture, resources available, the collectivity (of people around) and the perceptions embracing the universality of

their traditional ways of thinking. Essential characteristics of such primeval groups at one end of the civilisation continuum radically contrast with 'modernised' groups at the other end who claim to be developed societies on the scale of progress.

One has to keep in mind that under different ecological conditions, through varied historical processes and human creativity, every individual culture, primeval or modernised, can be portrayed with a unique profile in a spiral frame, instead of in a chronological linear order. Broad features distinguishing the indigenous peoples or tribal societies in the Indian context from modernised groups are informally sketched in Table 1.

Table 1: Human Civilisational Continuum

Parameters	Primeval Groups		Modernised Groups	
	Processes Manifestations	Manifestations (Characteristic Examples)	Processes Manifestations	Manifestations (Characteristic Examples)
Worldview				
Nature	Harmony with nature; “life and earth are synonymous”	Myths and superstitions, animism, spiritualism	Control of nature: “Earth as a commodity”	‘Institutional’ religions, rational pursuits
Nature	Abiding faith in nature (destiny), morals as regulatory device	Technology as an instrument	Closer to nature, superiority of human intervention	Technology as <i>raison d’être</i> of progress
Resources				
Possession	Collective custody, transitory ‘inter-generational’ rights	Societal trusteeship	Individual ownership, permanent control	Capitalism, capital-intensive technologies
Consumption	Regulated by needs	Barter economy, rhythm of replacing resources (e.g. <i>Jhum</i> cultivation)	Consumption as a token of gratification and status	Fiscal and market forces, consumer society leading to depletion of resources
Organization	Based on socio-centric roles; stratification within smaller units - self contained	Concept of <i>dharma</i> tribal clans, chiefdoms, <i>panchayats</i> , joint families, communitarian languages in smaller regions	Based on ego centred rights, expanding units	Concepts of equality and freedom, feudal rule, colonialism, Multinational corporations, standard languages of wider domain, globalisation
Values				
	Egalitarian ethos based on sharing	Solidarity, societal co-operation	Ambition centred norms based on dominance, “survival of the fittest”	Universal human rights, corporate privileges, constitutional rights
	Ascription-oriented transformations characterising age, gender etc.	Organic heterogeneity	Achievement-oriented mobility characterising accumulation	Structural efforts to homogenise

Source: Lachman Khubchandani, 1992. *Tribal Identity: A Language and Communication Perspective*. Shimla: Indian Institute of Advanced Study. pp. 6-7.

The tribal dictum “harmony with Nature” has served as a regulatory device for the communitarian use of natural resources. The abiding faith of tribal communities in nature is a living example of the Gandhian concept of trusteeship. It provides a firm foundation to the contemporary movements of protecting environment and promoting socio-economic structures that can be identified as need-based rather than greed-based. Under the Gandhian economic order, “the character of production is to be determined by social necessity and not by personal whim or greed” (*Harijan* 1952).

1. The Cosmos: *Nature and Nurture*

Tribals regard “life and earth as synonymous”. This gets manifested through their myths, superstitions, rituals and folk arts. Allegiance to such practices is often labelled as ‘animism’. Imperatives of survival lead primeval groups to harness nature. Such human initiatives, known as *nurture*, help in inventing artifacts, a creative extension of human potential to serve their needs. Gandhi who had a sensitive understanding of the grassroots reality of Indian masses, aptly eulogised nature, “I need no inspiration other than Nature’s – she mystifies me, bewilders me, sends me to ecstasies”. By contrast, modernised societies lie on the other extreme and are guided by a value system wherein “earth is treated as a commodity and an economic asset”. A superiority of human intervention, overpowering nature is regarded as the *raison d'être* of progress.

2. Resources: Possessions and Consumption

Indigenous peoples around the world have been utilising natural resources of their local environments in an ecologically sustainable manner. Tribals in India even today,

by and large, cherish the collective custody and transitory inter-generational rights over natural resources. This reflects a kind of societal trusteeship of which *jhum* cultivation and barter economy are good examples providing a rhythm of replacing resources as regulated by their needs. India is extremely rich in traditional knowledge systems (cf. Chapter 3). Traditional knowledge practices in crafts, music, dance, socio-religious activities, traditional systems of medicine and healthcare are well-known. Traditional knowledge, innovations and practices highlight the intellectual effort of indigenous and local communities. Many tribal rituals are performed in rhythmic harmony with seasons, such as the *pithoro* painting among the Rathwa Bhils in Gujarat (Devy 2002: 1-12).

It is only recently that the relevance of traditional knowledge is being realised for its wider applicability. Interest has been growing in incorporating traditional knowledge systems into truly meaningful approaches leading to development in a sustainable manner. There is need to gain a deeper understanding of these knowledge systems and their role in community life from an integral perspective that includes both material and spiritual aspects of a society as well as the complex relation between them to ensure a just and holistic societal development.

In contrast, modern technologised societies have been nourished with the obsession of individual ownership and increasing exploitation of global resources. Ostentatious consumption in itself becomes a token of gratification, status and success and a major factor leading to the rapid depletion of natural resources. Concomitant emergence of consumer societies organised around consumption of goods and leisure, are wedded to generating capital intensive technologies and

market economies.¹ Stretched to the extreme, such developments pose a serious threat to human ecology, causing permanent damage to the quality of life. John Muir's warning should serve as a timely reminder: "God has cared for these trees, saved them from drought, disease, avalanches, and a thousand tempests and floods. But he cannot save them from the fools".

There is a lurking fear that in the hands of contemporary institutions and technologies, traditional knowledge may get exploited to subdue nature and add to its degeneration. What is urgently required is an urgent effort to transform the perception of technologised groups to view nature as a companion instead of treating nature as a *commodity*. This can be achieved through sustained campaigns of creating mass awareness – a new form of *satyagrah* – a method that was successfully utilised by Gandhiji to achieve independence from colonial oppression. The great thinker E.F. Schumacher of the *Small is Beautiful* fame, emphasises concerted efforts for conservation of nature:

In the past when religion taught men to look upon Nature as God's handiwork, the idea of conservation was too self-evident to require special emphasis. But now that the religion of economics lends respectability to man's inborn envy and greed, and Nature is looked upon as man's quarry to be used or abused without let or hindrance, what could be more important than an explicit theory of conservation? (Schumacher 1973, 1977)

¹ Consumer society is characterised by increasing affluence, emergence of consumption sectors and individualism and growing socio-economic disparities. In fact, consumerism is both a cause and an effect of inequalities (Mathur 2007).

3. Values: Trust and Power

Self-contained tribals are generally confined to small units such as ‘down-to-earth’ clans, chiefdoms, *panchayats* and vernaculars, whereas large conglomerations generally evolve into ‘imagined’ expanding hierarchies propagated through the missionary zeal for promoting feudalism, ‘Divine Right of the Princes’ (in Medieval Europe), colonialism, domineering *killer* languages spreading to wider domains, cultural homogenisation, and many such empowering institutions (for insights into the processes of forming ‘imagined communities’ see Anderson, 1983). Such experiences create a social-economic divide (now being extended to a ‘digital divide’ in the Information Society) and idealise the doctrine of ‘survival of the fittest’.

This success is loudly measured with the indices of technology-led perfection (e.g. ‘standardised’ languages), achievement-oriented mobility (induced by the ‘Olympian’ targets of excellence), accumulation of resources and aggressive profiteering (as is evident in speculative stock markets). In this context, attention is drawn to the large-scale centralised systems that “require rationalisation and efficiency, routines and hierarchies – everything that runs counter to interpersonal contact, to communicative exchanges on an equal footing and to spontaneous discourse. In this process, we run the risk of losing the space to exercise our basic human right to *imperfection*, i.e. fuzziness not adhering to well-defined enclosures” (Khubchandani 2003).

Primeval groups, bonded by communitarian solidarity, trust and organic heterogeneity, stimulate creativity through various verbal and non-verbal genres of folklore and oral wisdom that are cultivated in public domains spilling across generations. The notion of *amae*, as cultivated in the Japanese communication ethos, idealises such a social order:

The Japanese people are known to value highly keen sensitivity about nurturing the concept *amae* in interpersonal and group communication, that is, seeking to protect a relationship (through mutual desire for a smooth, congenial transaction) (Doi 1974).

Modernised societies at the other end of the spectrum assign creativity to the latent-talents of an individual and market it by developing a milieu of commercial patents and other intellectual property rights, under the banner of 'freedom of expression' (Khubchandani 2003b).

Over the years, various programmes of socio-economic development that were driven by technology have revealed an ugly face of modernisation that is adversely affecting the quality of life. In the immediate post-Independence period, the parameters of scientific and quantitative approach of the West were more conducive to human upliftment than indigenous beliefs and values that were often characterised as 'other worldly'. Such rationalisations have created paradoxes grossly evident in the rapid degeneration of environment:

1. "*Me, the Master of Universe*" syndrome: The plundering of natural resources for short-term gains is legitimised as an index of development glorifying consumerism. Gandhiji, when questioned about the standard of living for India's teeming millions after they acquired freedom from colonial masters, had quipped, "It took Britain half the resources of the planet to achieve this prosperity. How many planets will a country like India require!!"

The depletion of natural resources – rivers, mountains, forests, wild life – poses an unprecedented challenge. This malady is further accentuated by an Oriental syndrome of "me, submitting to the power of nature".

2. "*Me, Submitting to the Power of Nature*": A mystical obsession with *moksha* (i.e. the ultimate transcendence

from the cycle of life) makes an individual oblivious to societal 'civic' concerns. It allows an individual to be callous about the collective pollution of public space, i.e., a lack of corporate civic sense. A gross insensitivity and indifference of an individual (along with well-knit groups such as families) to this phenomenon continues to perpetuate without any moral turpitude. In the context of socio-economic development, this responsibility is easily evaded to superior institutions such as the *mai baap* – the feudal lord, government or destiny. In recent times this malady has assumed metabolic proportions when it is replicated on a massive scale.

The increasing intensity of technological mediation in everyday life routines deprives an individual from one's own primary, personal and practical experience, thereby endangering the society as a community of communicative individuals. In this context, the quality of variation and pluralism in human communications is at stake.

Variety and Unity

Nature has many different ways of evolving even when the initial conditions are quite similar. Nature, through some intrinsic fluctuations, minimises entropy or disorder. The interplay between man and environment produces distinct and very often unique imprints in different areas, as unique as finger prints. Variation pervades all of nature, including human nature. Uniqueness in any social order is one of the manifestations of chaos.

Under such compulsions, we often ignore the sociological fact that all human conglomerations, the so-called 'primitive' as well as 'contemporary', acquire a unique, space-and-time-bound ethos (Khubchandani 1995a). Tribals in India show a substantial degree of variation. Tribal heritage needs to be

respected on its own terms. It will be disastrous to aim at absorbing tribal communities into the ‘mainstream’. Nehru had forewarned us against following such ‘interventionist’ policies, “There is no point to make them a second-rate copy of ourselves”.

It is only a synthesis emerging from the contradictions among diverse peoples that can bring the benefits of development to tribal society without causing physical, social or psychological damage. Expressing ideals of the pluralist heritage of the nation constituting a colourful mosaic of diverse ethnic and cultural groups within an organic whole, Jairamdas Doulatram, Governor of the United Assam during the fifties, was forthright in seeking to protect the genius of tribals in the North-East:

Every flower has the right to grow according to its own laws of growth; ... to spread its own fragrance, to make up the cumulative beauty and splendour of the garden. I would not like to change my roses into lilies nor my lilies into roses. Nor do I want to sacrifice my lovely orchids of rhododendrons of the hills (1955).

Human civilisations have blossomed by regarding the phenomenon of both *variety* and *unity* – the *unique* and the *universal* – as two sides of the same coin. The Canadian ‘First Peoples’ point out to this diversity in poignant terms:

We Are Still Here
We Contribute
We Are Diverse
We Have an Ancient and Ongoing
Relationship with the Land.

(Canadian Museum Of Civilisation, Ottawa)

During the past two centuries many tribal groups have gone through the trauma of various domineering forces in the name of progress and development (cf. Chapter 5). It is

time to seriously assess the relevance of tribal heritage to human civilisation and to understand how tribal ethos can contribute to resolve the challenges faced by the 'modern man'. In this regard, a few distinct qualities of tribal societies deserve consideration for their relevance to the modern milieu, namely:

1. The tribal culture at its best provides a living example of the Gandhian concept of trusteeship discussed earlier.
2. In cross-cultural settings, individual and group relations among tribals are valued on trust rather than on dominance. The modern concept of 'majority versus minority' appears very alien to the tribal ethos. Tribal interaction patterns derived from the traditional milieu are by and large characterised by a celebration of diversity. On the sociolinguistic plane, the tribal spirit of human trust, the consensus, is revealed in the composite characteristics of their identity and communication (cf. Chapter 6).

Tribal Panchsheel

The scheduling of tribes in the 1951 Constitution by the founding fathers has committed the nation to safeguard not only the socio-economic interests of these groups but also to facilitate their participation in the processes of development. This philosophy is reflected in Gandhiji's concept of trusteeship (similar to the custodial attitude of indigenous peoples towards land and life, referred in Table 1). In this regard, a formulation of the cardinal principles by Nehru (1958), known as 'Tribal Panchsheel', lays down the task in very eloquent terms:

We cannot allow matters to drift in the tribal areas or just not take interest in them. In the world of today that is just not possible or desirable.... The avenues of

development should, however, be pursued within the broad framework of the following five fundamental principles:

1. People should develop along the lines of their own genius and we should avoid imposing anything on them. We should try to encourage in every way their own traditional arts and culture.
2. Tribal rights in land and forest should be respected.
3. We should try to train and build up a team of their own people to do the work of administration and development. Some technical personnel from outside village will no doubt be needed, especially in the beginning. But we should avoid introducing too many outsiders into tribal territory.
4. We should not over-administer these areas or overwhelm them with a multiplicity of schemes. We should rather work through, and not in rivalry to, their own social and cultural institutions.
5. We should judge results, not by statistics or the amount of money spent, but by the quality of human character that is evolved (quoted in Elwin 1959).

It is unfortunate that at the implementation level these principles have generally been neglected (for a critique of Nehru's doctrine, see Pakem 1989). Most of the programmes for tribal development continue to be influenced by the perspective we inherited from 'colonial' anthropology wherein the tribals are often looked upon as 'museum specimens' to be cherished for their exoticness and to be clinically observed and analysed before their extinction, a

sort of *pre-mortem*, instead of a *post-mortem* (Khubchandani 1992a). With such a worldview, a field-worker may be adequately equipped with qualities of hand (i.e. data collection) and of head (i.e. interpretation), but an ‘alienating’ role may keep her/him away from developing the sensitivities of the heart (i.e., a concern and understanding for innovative processes to help tribals to adapt).

Conclusion

A convergence of perspectives of various groups of people allows an openness for all kinds of concepts. This plurality consciousness as espoused by different cultural traditions can combine different human endeavours into a new kind of balance between thought and deed, between activity and mediation (Khubchandani 2003a).

When we consider the human civilisation in totality, we should seriously attempt to work on an alternate model of development in the context of human ecology, spelled out by Khoshoo (1995, cited above while introducing the Chapter). Rev. Jackson, too, has issued a timely warning, persuading humankind that,

We need to come together and choose a new direction. We need to transform our society into one in which people live in true harmony, harmony among nations, harmony among races of humankind, and harmony with nature We will either reduce, reuse, recycle, and restore or we will perish (cited in Khoshoo 1995).

World leaders have been busy devising global strategies to tackle the threat with a sanguine hope that “humanity might save itself from the impending self-annihilation”.²

² First United Nations World Summit on Information Society, Geneva, December 2003; followed by the second United Nations World Summit, Morocco, November 2005.

These proclamations trickle from ‘top-downward’ when not matched by political will and adequate action at the ground level. We need to pave the way from ‘bottom-upward’ to create an optimistic vision for a pollution-free and eco-friendly planet.

Vital Voices

At the Vanishing Edge*

In a paradigm of *fair* communication, the prestige and dignity (and not powerlessness) should go with language networks encouraging complementation (*bhashas*, lingua francas), and not with those aspiring to promote exploitative and hegemonistic networks of communication (dominant languages, through majority pressures and market forces) on the local, national, regional and global scenes.

(Khubchandani 2003)

Being and Becoming

With a rapid penetration of mass media and Information and Communication Technology (ICT) in all walks of life, a new communication order is emerging on the global scene. There has been a lurking fear that the forces of globalisation will wipe out languages used by smaller populations, particularly those which do not have a written tradition. The issues of language endangerment acquire a greater salience under the premise that language is a crystallised being, insulated within well-defined enclosures and conceived around normative entities as cultivated in school education. Language as being is built through conventions. Verbal communications, bound within the milieu of literate traditions, are often viewed as standard 'ripened products' legitimised in the domains of literature, education and administration.

* Excerpts from the Keynote Address delivered at the tenth International Conference of the Foundation for Endangered Languages held at Mysore, India in October 2006.

At the same time, one cannot ignore that just as reality changes, a living language with its openness also undergoes perpetual change along with its usage. Language as an ongoing process in everyday life communication remains in a state of 'becoming,' a characteristic of open systems. Speech activity in oral traditions, depicting robust grassroots reality, operates on multi-layers of memory and interprets verbal and pictorial space by tentativeness and fluctuality, i.e., "What is customarily said" (Wittgenstein 1973), through constant negotiations. A written discourse, in contrast, is viewed as a reflective, contrived activity (discussed in Chapter 3). In a sense oral varieties of speech represent the 'avant-garde' face of language: "Main languages are banks (of the stream), the dialects are the flow of the stream" (Devy 2006).

There is an interplay of centripetal and centrifugal factors prevailing in a speech community that contributes to the natural growth of a living language. This is demarcated by flexible 'framing' and by transient elements of its self-organisation, informally presented in Table 2. Various aspects of a living language – as a communication device, as a strategy of control and as a repertoire in totality – reveal diverse characteristics of the speech process and its normative entity as a social artifact promoted by the custodians of language. This distinction makes us aware of the apparent paradox in the speech behaviour of plural societies marked by the complementarity of speech variation and at the same time, striving for language standardisation apparatus in a speech community.¹

¹ In this regard, Saussure's dichotomy of *parole* and *langue* (1959); Pike's *etic* and *emic* approach to language (1967), and Chomsky's model of language distinguishing *performance* from *competence* of the ideal speaker (1965) provide useful insights concerning the plurilateral facets of a speech community.

Physical and social scientists have been debating over the methods for building a bridge from *being* to *becoming*, providing insights for tackling issues distinguishing closely-knit systems from relatively open-ended systems in 'live', fuzzy reality (Prigogine 1980). The presentation here focuses attention on initiating a dialogue to identify the phenomenon of fluid and fuzzy enclosures in plural societies resulting from the changed scenario, with particular reference to South Asia.

Undoubtedly, economic and commercial factors of globalisation tilt the balance in favour of languages that dominate the physical space such as English has had on the electronic media, particularly in international forums and regional confederations like the European Union and is being perceived as the *killer* language (Fishman 2000). But at the same time, human interactions conducted through demographically and economically 'weaker' languages can assert their utility in less glamorous, but vital domains known as the communitarian space (predominantly in oral interactions, cited at the beginning of this chapter).

Dante, a leading architect of Italian standard language during the Renaissance, distinguished between:

1. *locutio prima*, a natural and living vernacular for emotional and interior life of people, particularly for art and identity, and
2. *locutio secundaria*, a refined and more precise vernacular responding to clear social purposes such as for court and state, sharing the communicative load of a community, although ranked in diglossic hierarchy (Lo Bianco 2005 : 109-33). Braga (1972:7-58) also discusses the dialectal premise for developing a comprehensive model in socio-linguistic studies, introducing a distinction between expectations concerning linguistic behaviour and actual performance.

Facets of a Language

One needs to identify several facets of language in use, namely:

- 1. as an expression of creativity in literature, an artifact attaining aesthetic heights as in the visual arts, music and dance;
- 2. as a vehicle of cultural identity fulfilling the human urge of gratification through affiliation to a particular heritage. In the context of insecurity, such affinity could find expression in emotive terms as in the case of one’s religious loyalty;
- 3. as a medium of communication in everyday life, in the realms of education, media, administration, judiciary and other occupational needs.

Table 2: Speech as Living Phenomena

	Speech Process	Normative Entity
I	Communication Device	
1.	An organic process, potentially diverse and heterogeneous.	A formalised entity, emphasising uniformity and homogeneity.
2.	Registered as a non-autonomous device, communicating in symphony with other non-linguistic devices; its full signification can be explicated only from the imperatives of context and communicative tasks.	Ideally aiming at the targets of being an autonomous and unambiguous tool of communication.
3.	Interpretation dependent on the focus of communication ‘field’ and the degree of individual’s sensitivity toward it.	Interpretation relying heavily on explicit formulas-grammars, dictionaries etc; efforts for consistency made through the standardisation apparatus.
4.	An effortless integral activity, discourse centres around the event with the support of ad hoc ‘expression’ strategies.	An ideal-oriented representation requiring directed effort; discourse concentrates on ‘expression’, which measures the ‘event’.

II Strategy of Control		
5.	Guided by implicit identity pressures -- a sort of etiquette agreed upon ad hoc by those participating in it.	Characterised by explicitly defined value system -- a prescriptive code with sanctions from the language elite in the community.
6.	Regulated by 'situation-bound' propriety in which ecosystems, constituting the social reality 'here and now', claim a prominent share.	Conditioned by 'tradition-inspired' profiles in which 'time-honoured' standard practices (spelled out through grammatical accounts, lexicons and style sheets) dominate the scene.
7.	Permissive toward inherited variations linked with region, class, etc.	Less tolerant toward such ascribed deviations; assimilatory pressures in favour of the elitist standard variety.
III Total Repertoire		
8.	Total verbal repertoire is malleable, responsive to contextual expediences, resulting in uninhibited convergence between speech varieties with the contact pressures of pidginization, hybridisation, code-switching, etc.	Total verbal repertoire is demarcated for the demands of different normative systems (specified by a 'distant' elite) stressing on maintaining divergent development of a different system; and insistence on exclusiveness or 'purity' of tradition.
9.	Greater scope of functional fluidity leading to innovations and creativity of expression in negotiating the 'event'.	Restrictions over the scope for spontaneity and creativity due to the pressures of exclusive conformity to different systems.
10.	Fuzzy speech boundaries; interlocking variations responding to covert stratificational and situational differences.	Sharp language boundaries; compartmentalisation through overt linguistic differentia.

Source: Lachman Khubchandani. 1983. *Plural languages, Plural Cultures: Communication, Identity, and Sociopolitical Change in Contemporary India*. East-West Centre, University of Hawaii Press, Honolulu.

In a fuzzy reality such demarcation often overlaps when responding to a variety of communication settings, as shown in Table 2. The ongoing flexibility in co-relating linguistic form with context, regulated according to the expediency of the communicative task, is the concern of pragmatic grammar:

All meanings are sensitive to context that, taken together, constitute a galaxy of contexts; these contexts are labelled as semantic galaxies (Friedrich 1979: 50)

It exhibits the connection between the theory of meaning for a language and its actual use. A speech event carries:

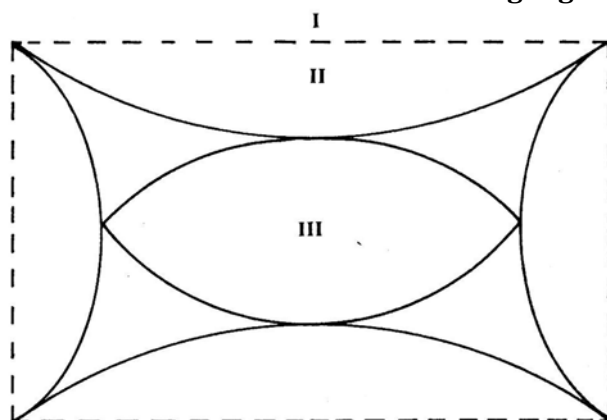
1. a 'formal' meaning within sentence(s) based on what the subject, the predicate and so on signify
2. a 'specificational' meaning within a context (conditioned by interactional roles, setting, channel, etc.) and
3. an 'affective' meaning within the discourse, emerging from the mutual relevance of various contributions to an interaction.

In the light of this, a three-dimensional model of language as shown in the Figure, isolates:

1. the *cognitive* dimension, to draw a broad 'blueprint' of the verbal activity,
2. the *identity* dimension, for providing 'specific' social details to the blueprint and
3. the design dimension, to 'filter' differential values over the specified details of the blueprint; it intensifies in a way, the focus which heightens compatibility in a speech act (for details, see Khubchandani 1973).

Language in a speech act can be characterised as an organism which drives to a purpose: it acquires a "practical cash value" determined by relevant use. Coarse meaning (the 'blueprint') will both determine and be determined by use. Wittgenstein positively insists in *use* itself as the determinant of meaning (1973). There is no fact of the matter concerning what someone means. There could be variable 'readings' of the same text or a reading between the lines.

A Three-Dimensional Model of Language



1. Cognitive 'blueprint'
2. Identifying 'specifications'
3. Design 'focus'

(Source: Lachman Khubchandani. 1997. *Revisualizing Boundaries: A Plurilingual Ethos*. Language and Development Series no. 4. New Delhi: Sage Publications, pp. 53.)

Language as a nucleus of culture is as much a way of thinking as of communicating. Language philosophers have been engaged in the debate for over centuries about the primacy of language, wherein language is essentially meant as,

1. a vehicle of thought (such as in Panini, Descartes, Chomsky), or
2. an instrument of communication (such as in Bhartrihari, Wittgenstein, Durkheim).

Pursuits of sustained development and peace in the strife-torn world have re-activated the debate over language being viewed as a mode of action, emphasising the 'synergic' qualities of participation. Malinowsky describes speech as social action, differentiating it from prepared text.

Perceiving language as an 'institution' moulded during the course of history, the endangerment and death of many minor languages with diminishing numbers of speakers across the world is a matter of widespread concern under the increasing pressures of globalisation:

By some counts, only 600 of the 6000 or so languages in the world are 'safe' from the threat of extinction. By some reckonings, the world will, by the end of the twenty-first century, be dominated by a small number of major languages. (Crystal 2000)

This phenomenon, like the large-scale destruction of environment discussed in Chapter 1, is both peculiarly modern and increasingly global (Krauss 1992: 4-10).

Some linguists and anthropologists view the reduction in functions of many minority languages and their subordinate or complementary roles in cross-cultural settings – a typical feature of societal bilingualism – with great concern. In the classical paradigm, lexical transfers from neighbouring languages and blending patterns of code-switching/mixing, code-neutralisation and pidginisation when not legitimised by language custodians, are viewed as 'language degeneration.' A typical example is the emergence of *lingua francas*, *Hindustani* and *Angrezi* (grassroots English) on the South Asian scene.

A linguistic initiative needs to be taken to identify the domains where ancestral language(s) are retained and the *contact processes* by which domineering languages creep in specific domains (with adequate/inadequate grasp). By this exercise, a linguist could win the trust of the endangered language community and as a language planner, would become one of the stakeholders in the changing context.

Language Enclosures

In recent years, information technology has made deep inroads into 'knowledge' and 'culture' industries, radically affecting the traffic regulations of human communication: "Computers are doing to communication what fences did to pastures and cars did to streets" (Illich 1985).

These enclosures and regulations redefine the community. Such developments undermine the spontaneity and autonomy of community life. Diverse speech profiles, native and non-native, provide a strong testimony to the fact that the binds and bounds of a speech community can be visualised differently on the time and space scale.

Different layers of space can be better understood through a non-exclusive pluralistic view of speech community. The issue of delineating language borders is not very different from that concerning the delineating of social borders:

Just as geographical borders vary from discreet (*sic*) signs announcing the existence of a boundary to the intricacies of customs inspections and military checkpoints, social borders vary in degree of definition from minimal acknowledgement of social similarity to its public and formal proclamation (Ross 1975: 54).

The South Asian landscape is an apt illustration of organic pluralism where different groups attempt to retain and preserve their unique cultural attributes while developing common institutional participation at the national level. This organic pluralism is distinct from structural pluralism of the West that is centrally stratified. Khubchandani elsewhere (1983, 1991) discusses a schema of four types of pluralism under the rubric of 'Plurality Square' in a global perspective:

1. Organic – homogenising and differentiating, and

2. Structural – homogenising and differentiating²

Herein, multiple identities get strengthened by a measure of fluidity in their manifestation. Chatterjee views Indian heterogeneity of speech within an overall organic unity of communication (1943). Gandhiji explains the interdependence of individual units in a society through an analogy of concentric circles in an ocean (1906). Describing an ideal community with multiple identities, he states:

There will be ever-widening, never ascending circles. Life will not be a pyramid with the apex sustained by the bottom. But it will be an oceanic circle whose centre will be the individual.

In such a plural pattern, the “inner circle” forms an integral unit of the “outer oceanic circle”, and will not be crushed by the overwhelming power of the outer periphery. On the contrary, each should give strength to the other (Kripalani 1959).

A Slovenian rebel poet Srečko Kosovel, representing the aspirations of a minority community in the erstwhile Yugoslav federation, has beautifully expressed this relationship; his intimate belongingness to the world community:

I am a broken arc of the circle.

² India, China and Japan represent typical cases of stratificational pluralism (organic, differentiating); the United States and Latin American countries can be cited as examples of melting pot pluralism (organic, homogenising); the Scandinavian countries are identified as examples of liberal pluralism (structural, homogenising); and the erstwhile USSR, Switzerland and Belgium typify corporate pluralism (structural, differentiating). Recent trends in India, Canada and the United States point to the processes favouring corporate pluralism (Khubchandani 1997: 98-103).

He presents a poignant recognition of individuality and at the same time, of entirety. As stated earlier, language boundaries in such milieus remain fuzzy and fluid and a verbal repertoire gets blended across well-knit language systems. Speakers in such a situation are hardly aware of operating across language boundaries (such as distinguishing between Marathi and Konkani, between Panjabi and Dogri). The Indian concept of *kshetra*, 'field, region' covers a wide spectrum of linguistic and cultural variation; it fosters between boundaries the feeling of oneness among diverse people – a sense of 'collective reality' in a communitarian space, not co-terminating with any existing political or administrative boundaries – *kshetras* are visualised as a rainbow where different dimensions interflow symbiotically into one another and are responsive to differences of density as in an osmosis (Khubchandani 1997: 84).

In contrast, the term 'region' in the West represents "a cohesive and homogeneous" area, created by an arbitrary selection of transient features such as religion, language, history (as crystallised in the concept of 'nation-state' in Europe).

In the verbal repertoire of an individual or of a group (a speech community comprising first language (L1) or second language (L2) speakers), there are many speech varieties identified in terms of such notions as native speech, mother tongue, dialect, register, standard language, inter-group language for wider communication, pidgin and patois. The entire variability phenomenon in language activity has been regarded in socio-linguistic studies as a conditioning process, reflecting the underlying constraints exerted by social relations in different interlocutions.

Individuals in a pluralistic society belong to different identity groups, clustered around cultural, linguistic and

social traits (such as nationality, religion, caste, language/dialect) and share only a core of experience, criss-crossing in more than one way but hardly co-terminating within the same boundary. Unlike natural sciences, the core in language may be 'distinguishable', but not necessarily 'separable' (Khubchandani 1983: 6):

Individuals joined by a single trait are generally marked by their *variety*, their *lack of unity*, and their tendency to act as fairly *discrete* groups relative to the pulls and pressures of time and space.

The phenomenon of maintaining ancestral languages among subaltern cultures (such as tribal communities in the Central belt, Saurashtrians in Gujarat, Dalits in Maharashtra) has not yet been given serious attention (Pandit 1972; Khubchandani 1983, 1992a). Of course in such a milieu, boundaries between languages remain fluid, calling into question our ability to separate one language from another. One can cite the case of Kangri that is counted as a variety of Panjabi in the 1961 Census but is re-classified as a variety of Hindi in the 1971 Census. A majority of the people in Kangra district of Himachal Pradesh are at variance in claiming their mother tongue as Kangri, Hindi or Panjabi in Census enumeration.

Speech varieties with a tag of subaltern cultures, notably tribal languages, vernaculars without writing, regional dialects and social registers swept under the carpet of dominant languages and hybrid *lingua francas* discarded as 'degenerated' variations, cannot be 'left behind' in language development programmes.

Revisualising Language Boundaries

A cursory look at the histories of different languages of South Asia provides numerous instances of shifts in the

communication environment of a speech community or of sharp value conflicts among the sub-sections. Diverse historical accidents can lead to an expansion, split or compromise among the domains of different languages or speech varieties available to a speech community. Dialectalisation of Braj and Awadhi during the past one hundred years where the custodians of these literary genres have shifted their patronage towards western Khariboli and have accepted it as the main standard for the entire Hindi community, is a classic example of human intervention in crystallising language boundaries.

Many literary languages such as Bengali, Marathi, Tamil, etc. carry a distinct identity with sharply marked enclosures. In contrast, most of the tribal languages represent oral cultures and are characterised by a flexibility of identities. Boundaries between two languages on a continuum, particularly among those belonging to tribals, are not sharply marked. Dominated by the oral milieu, different languages in a tradition get identified not so much by mutual isolation or unintelligibility, but by differentiating proprieties arising out of cultural rivalries in history.

The vast population of north Central India, represented by Hindi, Urdu, Panjabi and other vernaculars (comprising virtually half of the country's total population, 101 crores in 2001), is defined on the basis of identity imperatives and not on the criterion of historical branching of grammatical features of languages, as is evident in Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (1903-26) (Khubchandani 1972, 1983). Perceptions of speech communities in a plural milieu, *binding* varieties as 'dialects' of a language that demonstrate solidarity (as in Khariboli, Awadhi, Pahari, Rajasthani, Chhattisgarhi, Bhojpuri, Maithili, under the umbrella of Hindi), and *bounding* them as independent languages that highlight intrinsic distance (as in Hindi and Urdu, Panjabi

and Dogri in the north and Marathi and Konkani in the west) are crucial in devising language planning programmes). Kloss' (1967: 29-41) distinction of *Abstand* languages (i.e., by intrinsic distance) and *Ausbau* languages (i.e., by independent development) is also quite relevant here.

The recognition of Putong Hua (based on Mandarin) in the Chinese situation (DeFrances 1984) and of Hindustani (based on Khariboli) in the South Asian context are typical examples of enlarging the domains of *lingua franca*. In the thrust for solidarity and urbanity, the domain of Hindustani has been progressively expanding by incorporating many vernaculars of the Fluid HUP (Hindi-Urdu-Panjabi) region of South Asia in its realm and beyond, extending up to Singapore in Southeast Asia, Afghanistan in the Northwest and across the rim countries of the Indian Ocean in the Gulf and on the East African coast (notably Mauritius, South Africa, Tanzania, Kenya and Uganda).

On the other hand, standardised codes such as high Hindi and high Urdu are examples of the restricting domains of communication through distinct orthographies and literary traditions. Efforts to amalgamate Hindi and Urdu were unsuccessfully made in undivided India through the elevation of Hindustani (to be written in both Devanagari and Perso-Arabic scripts), propagated by Gandhiji and others during the freedom struggle.³

³ In the European context, Serbian and Croatian language elites in the erstwhile 'confederate' Yugoslavia consciously tried to forge a composite linguistic identity by effecting a *compromise* between independent and equally strong speech traditions and bringing them together as a single polycentric language (or language amalgam, called Serbo-Croatian, or Croato-Serbian for the sake of parity). Such elite-directed movements voluntarily reduce languages with a rich literary heritage (such as Brajbhasha, Awadhi in the Hindi belt, Kajkavian in the Balkans) to a vernacular status labeled as 'near-dialectised' language.

Recent assertions reversing the status of Serbian and Croatian as independent language *institutions* highlight the arbitrariness in demarcating the bounds of

Illiterate tribals, unlike the conflicts over diversity of language use visible among literate cultures in the contemporary milieu, seem to carry heterogeneity in everyday life communications very lightly on their shoulders. (cf. Khubchandani 1992a). One notices among the tribals a greater respect for variation in speech, and consequently, a less premium on the values attached to language purism. Many tribals belonging to Austric (Santali, Ho, Munda) or Dravidian (Kurukh, Kui, Kisan) families in the Chotanagpur plateau appear to be at peace with the grassroots grasp of creolised vernaculars of Indo-Aryan origin; these are identified under different labels as Sadri/Sadani, Khortha, Kurmali, or Nagpuria. A large section of tribals have even adopted these as their mother tongue. Similar is the case of Halabi – a hybrid of Gondi (Dravidian), and Chhatisgarhi and Marathi (both Indo-Aryan) languages in Madhya Pradesh and Maharashtra.

In the midst of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity in the North-East, it is interesting to note parallel efforts being made to form new alliances among erstwhile hostile language groups in Nagaland. In recent years a new language acronym, *Zeliangrong*, has emerged by clustering tribes speaking *Zemi* in Nagaland, *Liangmei* in Manipur, and *Nruanghmei* (Rongmei) in Cachar district of Assam. Tribes identified with *Chokri*, *Khezha*, and *Sangtam* languages in and around Kohima district in Nagaland are also welding a common identity under the acronym *Chakesang*. Recently, Angamis in the southern part of Nagaland have initiated a movement to bring together all allied tribes in the region covering Angami, Chakesang, Zeliangrong, and a few other minor tribes namely Rengma,

polygenic traditions. This is also evident from the recent controversies over the divergence of Ebonics from English in the United States (cf. Huang 1995: 1-3, Odlin 1999: 195-233), and Siraiki claiming divergence from Panjabi in Pakistan (Rahman 1996: 149-155).

Pome, etc., under a single umbrella called *Tenyedie*, the language of 'Tenye people'. A monthly journal, *Urauze* is brought out from Kohima under this banner.

Nagaland represents an area of dialectal confrontation where many small groups have been asserting privileges based on parity for respective languages in education, administration and public media. Identifying twenty four 'exclusive' Naga languages (Ao, Konyak, Angami, etc.), claimed by nearly two million speakers (in 2001), is a characteristic of this phenomenon.

In Arunachal Pradesh, the Tagins earlier identified with Nissis, later with Adis, and now claim their identity as distinct from both. In Manipur, the Anals, Aimols and Chirus earlier identified with the Kuki tribe but now prefer affinity with the Nagas.

The quest for a new paradigm of language development questions the enclosures conceived around normative entities as chaperoned by language custodians. Such a fixation invades the domains of 'relaxed' interactive communication in favour of 'uniform' categorisation censoring the 'live' creative interpretation of a speech event. It directs our attention to the issues of self-organisation as an ongoing process of becoming.

Tackling Endangered Languages

The relationship between language and culture is interwoven in a unique manner in different traditions. One of the major consequences of technology driven globalisation has been the increasing marginalisation of less populated language communities and intimidating hegemony of larger socio-economic networks. This phenomenon acquires more visibility through the excessive control of widely used languages in everyday life communications, notoriously identified as 'killer' languages.

As an illustration, one notices that in the communication landscape of the Bhili group of languages in Gujarat and Maharashtra, ancestral vernaculars remain intact for intimate (in-group) domains of kinship, rituals, festivals and folklore. At the same time, a dominant language such as Gujarati, Marathi or Hindi complements in inter-group public domains. Depending upon language attitudes of interacting groups one cannot rule out a gradual shift in favour of the dominant language.

The objective approach of the fieldworker or researcher studying endangered languages usually focuses on documenting the linguistic structures of phonology, grammar and lexicon as inherited from colonial anthropology. Such work does not directly relate to the concerns of the members of endangered communities who continue adjusting their communication needs through various strategies of language contact such as eco-pressures of language diversity. A fieldworker needs to be sensitive to the unique and often innovative communication processes being adopted by an endangered community to cope with the demands of times (cf. Chapter 1).

Individuals in an endangered language community cope with the changing communication needs through the contact of two or more languages. His/her mindset constructively responds to such culture transfer by blending ancestral language with the prevailing dominant language for his/her day-to-day needs (pejoratively called 'pidgins') or if required, to acquire necessary competence in the dominant language. S/he is not so much concerned about language purity as such.

Many technological devices designed to facilitate the mode and range of communications transcending historical traditions do not always lead to a better understanding among humans. Several processes of manipulation and

acculturation through mass media have been dubbed by many agencies as indoctrination and cultural invasion, a kind of communication imperialism. To reverse this trend, one needs to ponder over the strategies to be adopted in tackling the phenomenon of endangered languages. The following questions can serve as a guideline:

1. How is the “Tower of Babel” syndrome applicable to ‘threatened’ language varieties? Is diversity of speech in a community or in a space (i.e. societal multilingualism) an asset or a hindrance to growth of languages?
2. Should revitalisation strategies of ‘vanishing’ voices be guided by language autonomy or language purity on the lines of well-knit systems, or by language complementation or language blending, a characteristic of lesser used languages?
3. Who bears the socio-economic burden of revitalising such endangered languages or vernaculars? Does it amount to “the poor to perpetuate in poverty” and “the privileged to define and dictate the course of development”?
4. Can one promote a universal model of language plurality or should we recognise the ‘flexible’ plural ways of understanding plurality? How crucial are the issues concerning space and time bound unique reality of speech communication in the context of globalisation pressures, i.e. market forces, pervasive technologies and ‘pass the pole’ mechanisms of counting majorities/minorities?
5. How real are language boundaries in plural societies? Is language a benchmark, an abstract social construct on a heterogeneous speech spectrum at a particular stage in history vis-à-vis the ‘live’ robust ground reality of vernacular (inclusive of threatened species)?
6. Can one transcend the bounds of language tradition while striving for quality in communication, in consonance with the uniqueness and the dignity of

individual in a communication dyad? Are thought processes in individual speakers' in a plural society insulated within the bounds of a particular language?

7. What do we mean by integral human communication and the issues of language empowerment along with language competition (in favour of the dominant), and language attracting trust in a communication event (the term *amae* in Japanese, elucidated in Chapter 1) along with language co-operation between the so-called 'the majority' and 'the minority'?
8. Do we need to separate short-term strategies adjusting to immediate imbalances created or instigated by globalisation and long-term reflections over the phenomenon of living together, as vividly portrayed in the Oriental doctrine of *vasundhaiva kutumbakam* or "all the universe is family". In what manner does the quality of communication in plural societies transcend physical language boundaries in education and other public domains?

The new communication order has to come to grips for formulating a coherent policy of the rights of lesser-used languages/vernaculars, knitting together complex plural heritages that can contribute to the quality of communication in a changing society for an integral cultural development of humankind.

The Local and the Global

Our knowledge is not written down by us - on the contrary we dance it, we narrate it, we sing it, we practice it. There are many paths that lead to them We have a collective right to determine our own path to development. We need to develop a firm basis of knowledge on the consequences of our choices and decisions.

(Ole Hendrik Magge 2004)

Local knowledge is not a product conditioned by beliefs and practices of the past that needs to be preserved in museums and archives for posterity. Local knowledge is a *process*; it is a relational and fluid construct (such as vernaculars or *bhashas*). In a way, all knowledge is local; it emanates from the particular. Local beliefs have their own rationale and validity. Folk wisdom is context-bound and community-specific. It need not be consistent and systematic as it is generated 'bottom-upward' through social practices of everyday life. Folk cultures construct space and imagery in a flexible 'framing'. Their memory operates on multi-layers of time, creatively adhering to the past and at the same time, innovating changes by subverting it through selection, malleability and a kind of playfulness (as in advertising). The method of order and sequencing of such cultures could be syncretic.

Two Sides of the same Coin

Oral societies and local cultures in Asian and African hinterlands have for ages been transmitting unbridled folk

wisdom across generations. In course of history, this knowledge has been negotiated, modified and absorbed by the domineering global practices (Geertz 1993).

In hegemonic cultures, local knowledge of the subaltern is 'denigrated' as myth, primitiveness, superstition, or at best as exotic and cosmetic. On the other hand, local knowledge of the privileged is passed on as universal truth. "Global is the self-presentation of the dominant particular" (Hall 1997: 67). Scientific assumptions are guided by certain ideologies through 'top-down' processes of abstractions; these get legitimised through a veneer of objectivity such as language equality, language purity, language precision or language autonomy as conceptualised in pragmatic studies. However, despite the onslaught of modernization, local knowledge cannot get totally eradicated.

The local and the global, the particular and the universal, should be viewed as two sides of the same coin rather than as competing with each other. An apt analogy would be the complementary functions of bi-focal glasses focusing on near-sighted and far-sighted objects.

Our conceptualisation of the prevailing diversity in communications in everyday life needs to be treated as a 'humane' enterprise with somewhat lighter overtones. One can cite the example of plurilingual repertoires among illiterate tribals in India who do not get distracted by the grave and often intellectual stands taken by the academia when applying theories of language acquisition and language contact. In the realm of social planning, intellectuals often lose track by focussing their attention on weighing grains (such as speech in everyday life transactions) on the *precision scale* used for weighing gold (such as the way language is treated in a scientific discourse).

The *folk* in western literature is associated with 'aborigine, rustic' that gets nourished in oral tradition by

blind faith. Anthropologists such as Greives and Malinowsky in early twentieth century treated *folklore* as “a manifestation of the initial stage of human being – a subject of the uncultured society”, whose peculiarities are to be found in the past ruins. Bhagwandas Patel brings out this distinction poignantly:

The western concepts of the ‘folk’ and of the ‘literature’ of oral tradition do not tally with the Indian thinking about the folk.... (Folk is regarded as) a living limb, ever sprouting, ever increasing and adopting new forms every day, rather than the fossilised and lifeless thing. (2004: 216)

The Indian discourse regards ‘folk’ as natural and inherent in comparison to the learned and considers folk literature as a creative source and the basic foundation of classical literature:

Whatever there is, the folk is polished in the *shastras*; it is systematised, it sometimes comes from the natural intuition of the folk (Abhinav Gupta, cited in Patel 2004).

Vyas, in Mahabharata (*Udyog Parva*), regards folk as charged with the power of omniscience that looks to the present and sees the universe in all its variety. The one who knows the folk knows all. There is synthesis and not discordance between the folk and the learned.

The experience of living together in a multilingual world armed with new communication technologies has brought a new scenario of ‘haves’ and ‘have nots’ in a digital divide. Debates on modernism and post-modernism are not value-free and culture-neutral. Modern knowledge is by and large local to communities in the west, termed as *glocal*, with claims on universality and scientific truth. Its validation

across cultures makes knowledge global.¹ An emphasis on creating a digital solidarity instead of a corrective thrust on bridging the digital divide merits serious attention. Powerful people-centred solutions of ICT should be tuned to the celebration of the masses, their humanity, rights, aspirations to justice and creativity.

In this perspective, human communications may be seen as resting on two pillars, power and trust. The status of a language is determined by power relationships, whether political, socio-economic, communitarian as well as by other varied configurations. The effect of communication, however, in formal domains as well as in informal contexts, is mostly negotiated through mutual trust among various individuals and sections in a society. On the political plane, language hierarchies have become a salient feature of power, leading to new conflicts and erosion of trust at the human level.

Orality and Literacy

A native speaker's use of speech in everyday life is an integral activity, a complex interplay between linguistic exchange and related action. It gets modulated on the scale of *intentional* and *instinctive* extremes. At the intentional end, thought processes are sequential through deliberate (audio-monitored) speech; verbalisation is overt, mediated and attention in the discourse is concentrated on 'expression'. On the other hand, at the instinctive end communication

¹ In this context, we should take note of the penetrating observations made by noted philosopher Daya Krishna:

.... To adopt a well-known expression from Sartre, all non-western cultures have been reduced to the status of 'objects' by being observed and studied by western concepts and categories, which are treated not as culture-bound but as universal in character. In a deep and radical sense, therefore, it is only the West that has arrogated to itself the status of subjecthood in the cognitive enterprise, reducing all others to the status of objects (1988).

processes are simultaneous to extemporised speech (integrated with somatic reactions, gestures, etc.); verbalisation is spontaneous and involuntary and attention in the discourse is concentrated on 'event' (cf. Table 2, Chapter 2).

In an oral milieu, both thought and expression tend to be aggregative and concrete (i.e. are context-determined) as if "the texts were inscribed almost into the body's motor memory" (Ramanujan 1999). Whereas, in a written tradition they aim at precision and abstraction (i.e. are context-independent).

Ancient grammarian Bhartrhari explains the unity of language, *sphota* as "a bursting forth of the illumination of insight," by relating the *universal* and the *particular* characteristics of meaning at two speech levels:

1. *Vritkaala* speech in a sequential time, as in *vaikhari vaak*, "the outer speech", the sounds uttered sequentially make up a sentence, a poem, or a book; the word in action, the word used i.e., the action accomplished – what synergically transpires, and
2. *Svakaala*, "the inner speech" marking the speech in own time as in *pashyanti vaak*, the word 'reflected' in the intellect of both the speaker and the listener, an instantaneous perception of reality.

Between the two extremes there is *madhyamaa vaak* or "the middle level of speech". Here, the unitary *sphota* breaks up into a sequence of thoughts, phrases and words but has not yet reached the separateness of individually uttered sounds. The integral *vaak* is gradually externalised while speaking; while listening this process gets reversed (Iyer 1969, Coward 1980, Khubchandani 1999).

Communication as a spontaneous activity is characterised by effortlessness. The Buddhist doctrine of

madhyama maarga or “the middle path” stresses the fact that human beings function at best in the merging of two extremes, i.e., by treading the middle path. Such moderation enables one to attain harmony between relaxation and alertness. The Jaina theory known as *syaadavaada* is another codification proposing a multi-valued logic that stresses complementarity, potency, potentiality and possibility. The Heisenberg Principle of Uncertainty in physics also shows that the concept of probability “potential” in an event is to be reckoned as a kind of reality (Heisenberg 1959). Such indeterminate characteristics account for the quality of communication in face-to-face encounter as realised through the “balancing of the whole”.

Communication being *dyadic* in nature, it creates social behaviour from individual behaviour; behaviour which creates togetherness, a community. Everyday speech in human interaction, though not well-defined, never loses immediate connection with reality, whereas idealised language with precisely defined concepts is confined to a *construct*, a sort of 'formalised' reality. Speech, however, as an ongoing process responding to a variety of communication settings, is as much a product of *environment* as of *tradition*; British English during the Anglo-Saxon rule in Britain and Urdu during the medieval Muslim rule in India are good illustrations of this synthesis (Khubchandani 2005). The logician Tarski points to this dilemma:

It may, however, be doubted whether the language of everyday life, after being 'rationalised' in this way, would still preserve its naturalness and whether it would not rather take on the characteristic features of the formalised languages (1956).

One can cite several examples of syncretism in social sciences, such as the notion of 'language' for a speaker is not the same as to a linguist while classifying languages on the

basis of genealogical correspondences. This phenomenon is referred as the paradox of *performance* and *perception*, more evident in the fluid zone covering Hindi, Urdu, Panjabi, Kashmiri areas in the northern subcontinent than in the southern region which is known as the Stable Zone and surmised from fluctuations in an individual's claims of mother tongue in decadal Census (Khubchandani 1976). In natural sciences this phenomenon has been explained as the "cat situation – Schrodinger's Cat" (Gleik 1987).

In the Indian tradition, both oral and literate cultures have played a vital role. Literacy is not an all-or-none phenomenon. Oriental heritage rejects the supremacy of one culture over the other:

(It is) a tribute to Hindu culture, rather than an act of derogation, to recognise that a complex literature could be developed and perpetuated by the human mind and memory alone, without the 'artificial' extension of writing systems (Bright 1988: 22-38).

But contemporary society has succumbed to what Argentinian philosopher Jorge Luis Borges calls "the cult of the book" (1960). Nowadays, it is writing, not speech which most educated people regard as basic and indeed as a necessity. A reminder from the noted art critic Ananda Coomaraswamy is more telling:

Necessities are not always good in themselves, out of their context: some, like wooden legs, are advantageous only to men already maimed (1946: 19).

In contemporary societies many modernisation processes often undermine the multi-way interaction and participatory processes in human communication that focus on grasping reality in its total ramifications, somewhat similar to understanding a painting or music. Typically, rural cultures manifest this reality through the internalisation of

traditional knowledge. Literate cultures, in contrast, lay stress on comprehending the verbal discourse through segmental linearity of writing systems. One cannot ignore the ecological imperatives of stratification and situational multiplicity pervasive among oral cultures and the new values being injected through development and globalisation ventures initiated by the State. With the thrust for globalisation, the wisdom and insights embedded within the age-old traditional cultures are vanishing at an alarming rapidity. It will therefore be prudent to focus upon the continuum between oral and written traditions and to consider strategies of incorporating the characteristics of mass culture into literate culture.

Indian Knowledge Systems

The assets of oral traditions among the indigenous people at the grassroots level have been transmitted from generation to generation through varied forms of folklore – *ramleela*, *harikatha*, *pithoro*, *bhagat*, *jatra*, *palkhi* and other modes of discourse – still prevailing in our fairs and festivals, rituals and artifacts. The feats displaying skills of both mindfulness and memory (through regular ritual chanting of *mantras* or by citing entire texts with varied concordances, etc.) are part of the learned oral traditions since ancient times.

Different societies at different times have been engaged in varied literacy practices. Among traditional societies in the East as well as in the West, the written text was conceived basically as an aid to spoken performance. In the Indian tradition it is well known that oral transmission of the Vedas and other Sanskrit literature has been practised from ancient times and is continued even in the present. A prominent Indologist, Burrow mentions:

... even when writing was introduced this oral tradition persisted in the various departments of knowledge, and it

continued as a basic feature of Indian education down to modern times ... Use of writing was only slowly adopted in the Brahmin schools, and in the early period its functions lay primarily in business and administration. (1955: 64-65)

According to a French Indologist Reneou,

Dissemination by recitation was frequent, even for secular or semi-secular works, specially the Epics. Brahminical teaching, including that of grammar, had been entirely oral till a previous date...Panini attests the existence of writing, but not its use in teaching; his grammar, with its supplements, gives reason to believe in a purely oral tradition. (1957: 32-34)

The Sanskrit term *smṛti*, literally meaning “remembered”, is applied to post-Vedic literature known to have been transmitted orally from early times:

From the Indian point of view a man can only be said to know what he knows *by heart*; what he must go to a book to be reminded of, he merely knows of. (Coomaraswamy 1946: 27)

There is every likelihood that writing was known and used in South Asia from the Pre-Mauryan times:

(But) that it was probably restricted mainly to commercial and other practical purposes, and only adapted to sacred or secular literature in later times. This in turn suggests that the tradition of oral composition and of verbatim transmission was maintained in India well into the Classic period of Sanskrit literature. (Bright 1988: 22-38)

According to Narasimhan,

The very earliest writings were either public notices – commemorations, dedications, and proclamations -- or

lists for accounts, keeping of inventories, sales, purchase, etc. Later, writing was used to produce exegetical and religious texts. But for a long time the writing style closely mirrored the oral modes of thinking, speaking, and arguing. (1998: 204)

Later in the West, written prose texts became a central aspect of Western linguistic theorising. From the beginning, Greek linguistic scholarship has been concerned primarily with the written language. The term 'grammar', which the Greeks applied to the study of language, bears witness to this; it is derived from the word for "the art of writing" (Lyons 1968: 9). At the same time, Greek philosophers like Plato pointed out to the adverse effects of writing on the quality of communication and warned that writing would corrupt human memories, fostering both credulity and mistrust (Jowett 1892; also see Dante in the footnote, Chapter 2). In medieval England, written contracts were at first regarded with suspicion. As Clanchy has observed, "A man's spoken word was his bond, it was felt, but a piece of paper was *just* a piece of paper" (1979).

The World Intellectual Property Organisation (WIPO) uses the term *Traditional Knowledge* (inter-changeable with 'indigenous knowledge') to refer to:

.... tradition-based literary, artistic or scientific works, performances, inventions, scientific discoveries, designs, marks, names and symbols, undisclosed information and all other tradition-based innovations and creations resulting from intellectual activity in the industrial, scientific, literary or artistic fields.

The Indian Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (ICSIIR) publishes the *Indian Journal of Traditional Knowledge* to preserve, document and disseminate traditional knowledge in an attempt to bring the wisdom of the past to the present.

Indigenous Education

In everyday life we use language “to fit the external world into our own world..... The symbolic representation of experience, whether in children’s play or our own gossip, is of the same order as that of the novel, the poem or the song, all of these modes enable the onlooker to contemplate the possibilities and consequence of the experience portrayed” (Grugeon 1972).

Spelling out the challenges of indigenous education, a UNESCO study envisages that traditional knowledge of indigenous people, alive in oral tradition through customs and festivals, folklore and artifacts, should form a part of *integral* education. A thrust to holistic education “requires that indigenous knowledge systems can contribute to the renewal of education systems of other peoples by more participation in decision-making. It provides training for *interconnectedness* and *accessibility* of cultures” (King and Schielmann 2004). American Indian scholar Magge, introducing the study cited above highlights the discrimination suffered by minority groups due to the exclusion of indigenous cultures and traditional knowledge in school (cited at the beginning of the Chapter).

Amartya Sen stresses on collective strategy to ensure the interconnectedness of equitable education attainment for indigenous children “to be able to reach for the best in the global garden of knowledge” (1995).

Traditionally, non-formal education has drawn its strength from the *mass appeal* through the pursuit of folk arts and crafts, missionary zeal and dissent movements:

Non-formal education is enmeshed in the cultural milieu of society as a part of life-long education, pursued through *literacy or without it*. These societies, while relying heavily upon the implicit mechanisms of oral tradition for the transmission of knowledge, continue to assign literate

groups (or individuals) certain essential liaison / intermediary functions. Literacy in these societies, no doubt, forms an important asset and accomplishment of an individual, but is not a necessary condition of her/his survival and dignity (Khubchandani 1981: 73-74).

Among the Oraon tribals in eastern India, before the advent of literacy there were indigenous institutions, *jonkherpa* and *dhum kuria*, “dormitories for boys” and *pel erpa* or “dormitories for girls”, for transmitting the wisdom of elders and its interpretation through story-telling, riddles, songs and dances.

Formal education, on the other hand, has historically pitched itself through elaborate mechanisms of selection. It is initiated by literacy and is streamlined through certain time-bound stages in a credential-based system. In the early stages, the use of scripts was highly circumscribed, restricted only to a few people who were especially trained in the craft of reading and writing. Initially, literacy meant merely knowing the skills of reading texts in several writing systems. Writing skills were regarded as a specialised task of writing by calligraphers on papyrus and other palm-leaf parchments.

Contemporary Education

Many educational bodies at the national and international levels have advanced educational, psychological, socio-political and historical arguments in support of the axiom that the best medium for teaching a child is his/her mother tongue (UNESCO 1953: 11). Strictly speaking, the medium of education should adhere to the child's chronologically first native speech as a spontaneous activity, acquired along with all variations around him/her while the child is growing up. In its report, UNESCO (2003) re-affirms that the mother tongue medium is “an essential component of inter-cultural

education and linguistic diversity so as to ensure respect for fundamental rights”, asserting self-esteem, identity, dignity and power of smaller groups through language (Khubchandani 2003a).

In everyday life, interactive experience is usually soaked in vernaculars or the *bhashas*; and subsequent ‘abstract’ concepts are dressed in language. Literate cultures, however, are associated with the eclipse of dialects. They generally regard vernaculars and hybrid varieties (patois, pidgins, creoles, etc.) as a sign of inferior socialisation that are vulnerable to abuse and discrimination. The use of these language varieties are discouraged in formal situations in schools, as is revealed from the pejorative attributes assigned to the patois evolved among tribal communities (such as Sadani in Chotanagpur and Nagamese in Nagaland). In this ‘filter-down’ approach promoted by the educational elite, the grassroots ‘folk’ plurality is devalued and language teaching gets focused on remedial programmes so that the ‘backward’ pupils speaking hybrid varieties become eligible for entry into the ‘advanced’ world through the mastery of standard language(s). In the school lore, the educational disadvantage experienced by rural and poor children is often thought to have its origins in the language deprivation the child suffers at home during the pre-school years and afterwards (Bernstein 1971). Rural ‘non-standard’ varieties of language are rated grammatically as ‘incorrect’ and ‘bad’; conceptually as ‘deficient’ and sociologically as ‘deprived’. The term *graamyā* ‘rural, rustic’ is used in the sense of *hiina* ‘low, mean’; and the term *naagar* in the sense of the ‘learned’.

The elitist system of education does not account for the complexity of speech variation across dialects in flux (and in a plurilingual society, even across languages) at the grassroots level. A child's earliest first-hand experiences in

native speech do not necessarily show semblance with the formal 'school version' of her/his mother tongue. Schools have a strong tendency to employ exclusively the *representational* model of language, even though if it may be irrelevant to the overwhelming majority in plurilingual societies. Schools generally place a premium on explicit, unambiguous and overt manifestation of language by laying an obsessive attention to its rational and overt use. The *Barbiana Letter* (1970), raising an accusing finger at the teacher who represents the higher-class values of speech, points out to the fundamental rights of individuals:

All citizens are equal without distinction as to language But you honour grammar more than constitutions Languages are created by the poor, who then go on renewing them forever (as an organic activity). The rich crystallise them in order to put on the spot anybody who speaks in a different way or in order to make him fail exams (exponential remarks in parantheses).

Ironically, it falls upon the common man to acquire the language of the academic, which may be quite unrelated to one's felicity in communication skills. No wonder, mother-tongue textbooks in many tribal languages are "originally written in English and then translated in local languages" as "authors in the local languages are not available!!" (Sharma 1971).

Most standardisation devices in Indian languages today serve only to extend the conventional value system of a small section of urban elites. So far, there does not seem to be much realisation of the difficulties arising out of the unintelligibility of the 'instant' highbrow standards projected in mother tongue textbooks that are faced by the rural population. The plans of language custodians for developing puristic 'pedantic' standards of language (on the lines of the nineteenth century Latinised English and the Sanskritised

or Perso-Arabicised highbrow literary styles of Indian languages) accentuate divergence in the home and the school environment. It further puts a heavy strain on the users of dialects/vernaculars (such as those speaking Sirmauri, Kumaoni, Marwari, Chhatisgarhi, Bhojpuri, Magahi), while acquiring literacy through textbooks in 'high' standard Hindi, i.e. Khariboli. This also runs counter to the concerns of the felicity of expression of students through mother tongue education and consequently results in a high rate of early drop outs, negating the targets set in the "Education for All" programmes.

The transcending interests of humankind require developing infrastructures and frameworks for a dialogue among cross-sections of society so as to ensure appropriate desirable expansion of new communication technologies that can project the vision of the future.

REALITIES

Managing Diversity

Plurilingual Ethos

Cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature.

.... Diversity is the very condition without which globalisation cannot endure.

(UNESCO 2000)

A majority of the regions in South Asia are marked by a plurality of cultures and languages in a single space such as a village, town, district, state or nation. South Asia as a 'civilisation continent' inhabits one sixth of humanity. It is a land with many 'pasts', various traditions and faiths (institutionalised or otherwise), diverse languages (literary and non-literary) and writing systems (derived from Brahmi, Semitic, Roman and local traditions).

Comprehending Plurality

Today, there is a greater understanding of cultural pluralism in the vast Indian polity that is a federation of thirty-five states and Union Territories. The total population of India exceeds one billion (in 2001), characterising several syncretic elements that often contradict one another. The edifice of linguistic plurality in the Indian subcontinent is traditionally based upon the complementary use of more than one language in a space, typifying a sort of 'egalitarian' bilingualism that usually does not threaten 'minor' languages. Diversity of speech styles, dialects and languages prevailing within a region are associated with differential values in social interactions, providing a unique model of "unity in midst of diversity" in both verbal and non-verbal

communications. Polish international reporter Ryszard Kapuscinski, on coming to India, was so much numbed by the scale of diversity in the land that he evocatively ruminates:

India is all about infinity – an infinity of gods and myths, beliefs and languages, races and cultures; in everything, and everywhere one looks, there is this dizzying endlessness (2006).

India has been a ‘live’ laboratory showcasing a plurilingual ethos since ages. In this milieu, an ‘organic’ complementation of different languages has thrived through the processes of *synergy* (i.e. putting forth one’s own efforts) and *serendipity* (i.e. accepting the other on his/her own terms and being open to unexpectedness). An amalgamative approach to diversity is marked by a sense of harmony built through respect for liaison languages among different speech communities. This contact phenomenon gets manifested by transient adaptation processes such as an ‘open-ended’ transfer of words and phrases from other languages called ‘relexification’ (Khubchandani 2003c). One such typical feature is that of the ongoing re-Sanskritisation happening in different periods of history with *tatsama* and *tadbhava* forms.

The Indian experience demonstrates that an understanding of plural societies will largely be guided by the view of language as a synergic network fostering creativity and inspiring trust in ‘unique’ cross-cultural settings along with the complementarity of empowering the ‘particular’. Each language has its own way of seeing the world and is the product of its own particular history. All individual languages have their individual identity and aura and all languages are equally adequate as modes of expression for the people who use them:

The way world's centers, peripheries and borders fit together depends on our own view of the world, and the lenses we see it through.... It is worth looking at the world from different angles.... Difference does not imply difference in worth -- just the opposite. Different academic viewpoints foster creativity (Sukala 2007).

Everyone need not think in the same way. In such a milieu, prominent values of interaction, ways of interpreting, of sharing experiences, of thinking, collectively known as the *communication ethos*, are guided by relevance and not solely by the equations of power.

There are different ways of interpreting location-specific cultural legacies. In a plural milieu, 'language needs' are to be viewed as a social and political construct, as a benchmark on a heterogeneous speech spectrum. Networks catering to diverse culturally relevant content ought to be pursued with a pluralist vigour so as to promote the flowering of cultural diversity on lines similar to the environmental conviction of nurturing bio-diversity (UNESCO 2000, quoted above). Diversity of cultural traits such as languages is ensued by the underlying unity of communication ethos.

The emerging thrust of communication technology in contemporary societies raises questions such as how an individual being exposed to a plurilingual ethos, generates necessary competence to withstand the pressures of high power media; in other words, how can an individual be a real master of the new vistas opening up through the overwhelming exposure to varied communicating information technologies?

Flexible Boundaries

Speech communities in a plural milieu organise their verbal repertoires through varied strategies:

1. A consensus is discerned among its members over the use of a variety standardised for formal and wider communication settings in the midst of many geographical or social varieties available for restrictive domains. The situation promotes assimilatory trends among the speakers of various dialects in favour of a single standard.
2. A verbal repertoire is marked by functional complementation known as diglossia, as is the case of Panjabi-Hindi in India and Panjabi-Urdu in Pakistan. In this dichotomy of codes, generally the super-layered variety, acquired subsequent to the native variety, is identified with formal (i.e. 'high') functions and primary varieties for informal/intimate (i.e. 'low') functions.
3. A language amalgam is characterised by 'bi-modal/multi-modal' standardising processes along with an expression of *polycentric* linguistic identity among its members, such as the British English tradition is distinct from American or Australian English traditions and further *native* English traditions being markedly different from 'grassroots' *non-native* Englishes spread all over the globe.
4. Autonomous language institutions emerge by distinct developments crystallising *Ausbau* languages from a common communication base such as in the Indo-Pakistan subcontinent, 'high' Hindi and 'high' Urdu have distanced themselves though both have crystallised from the malleable Khariboli base, as a mark of conflicting political and cultural identities. Similarly, Bahasa Indonesia and Bahasa Malaysia have been shaping differently from the common base Malay, as an expression of sovereign identities.

A pluralistic worldview and syncretic approach interpreting heritage and culture have been characterised as

the essence of Oriental life. The plural heritage of India allows for a greater 'openness' for variation in its cultural traits that is determined by one's attitudes. The question of identity is linked with a number of 'live' variables – transactive and non-exclusive – leading to multiple choices.¹

There could be many social constraints on using choices, guided by discretion and by determining identities in the pursuit of harmony. In interactive and relaxed settings such choices may be determined by individual priorities characterised as 'language play'. In collective public domains, these may be guided by conventions labelled as communication ethos.

This 'openness' to variation further explains the dissonance between maintaining tribal identity and the erosion of tribal language claims as is the case of Bhils in the Rajasthan-Gujarat region and of Kharias and Bhumijis in Orissa. In this context, demographic accounts *per se* are not as important as the access and control over resources of various kinds among tribals and non-tribals (cf. Chapter 6).

One notices many permutations and combinations marking assertion and erosion or blending of ancestral languages among tribals. The emergence of blending varieties of tribal and non-tribal languages such as Sadani in Jharkhand and Nagamese in the Nagaland-Arunachal region articulates the quest for preserving such identity. A similar trend is noticed among the Parsis in Gujarat and Maharashtra who speak a 'Parsi' variety of Gujarati in everyday communication.

The identity among Jharkhand tribals in eastern India represents a convincing case of the *amalgamative* perception of cultural synthesis transcending language families as

¹ The phenomenon of language play is conspicuously exemplified in bilingual advertisements in mass media (print as well as audio-visual) in Indian landscape. (Khubchandani 1991c)

pointed out by the noted linguist and activist, Ram Dayal Munda:

Culturally, Chotanagpur is the only area in the entire country where three major cultural streams – Aryan, Dravidian and Austro Asian, represented through various languages – have converged to create a cultural synthesis of its own kind (1989).

It signifies the vitality of non-exclusive (complementary or in mutual harmony) identities in a pluralistic framework. Such cultural synthesis can be described as grassroots Aryanisation (distinct from elitist Sanskritisation, a characteristic of standard literary languages) where the Jharkhandi regional identity gets defined around the grasp of Indo-Aryan Sadani (also known as Nagpuria) language. Persistent efforts are being made to develop a literary diction in Nagpuria written in Devanagari script. This phenomenon is explained by asserting a particularist identity through their ancestral language (Santali, Korku, Ho, etc.), a regional identity through the consensus over creolised Sadani/Nagpuria and a national identity through the super-layered consensus over Hindi. All three identities are in harmony, organising their verbal repertoire through fluid complementation of different vernaculars or languages surrounding them.

Multiple Identities

The above deliberation convinces us that many communities in South Asia grow up with multiple identities without ‘fixed’ hierarchies. Amartya Sen endorses this view:

We belong to many different groups defined by religion, profession, politics, language, literature, culture and so on. And potentially, any of these memberships could be the basis of an important identity (2006).

In such a milieu, there are many instances where groups criss-cross language boundaries in their verbal repertoires, often resorting to code-switching (cf. many youth programmes on Doordarshan, particularly sports and Bollywood interviews). Although bilingualism in a community as well as in a region is acknowledged, various spatial aspects of behaviour as in regional dialects, bilingualism, diglossia, language contact and borrowings, are framed in terms of temporality. In this sense, language ought to be viewed as the *product* and at the same time as the *expression* of the culture of its speakers.

The characteristic of maintaining two (or more) mother tongues is a notable feature of plurilingual India. Contemporary disciplines do not take cognisance of multiple languages existing side by side and a speech community is still identified according to homogeneous constructs, in terms of formal structures and monistic values, attitudes and usage. In a monistic framework, these groups are identified with only one mother tongue. Many bilinguals in such a milieu find it difficult to identify themselves as native speakers of 'a' language:

So deep does bilingualism go in parts of Ganjam (in Orissa) that from very infancy many grow up speaking both Oriya (Indo-Aryan) and Telugu (Dravidian), and are so much at home in both that they cannot tell which to return as their mother tongue (Hutton in 1931 Census, cited in Khubchandani 1983: 8-9).

One finds such traits among urban communities as well. Reporting my own speech spectrum, I describe the plurilingual landscape representing northern India as follows:

The use of mother tongue Sindhi is confined to domestic and cultural needs; a smattering of Marathi and Panjabi is useful in local surroundings; the use of *lingua franca*

Hindi/Hindustani and Urdu dominates inter-group communications, and Indian English with many shades caters to my academic and 'sophistic' domains (even when interacting within my own Sindhi community). (Khubchandani 2003c: 315-16)

Canagarajah, reporting his own upbringing in Sri Lanka, observes:

.... developing equal competence in two or more languages from childhood, fluidly moving between each of them in everyday life according to different domains of family (regional dialects of Tamil), school (English), neighbourhood (Muslim dialect of Tamil), and government institutions (Sinhala 2005: 16).

A plural milieu possesses an innate capacity to adapt to eco-pressures along with the legacy of tradition. The North-Central region of the South Asian subcontinent, called HUP (Hindi-Urdu-Panjabi) region represents a typical case of a 'divided joint family' which includes many vernaculars enjoying hierarchical positions under the umbrella of *togetherness*, but which are again split in diametrically opposing camps namely, High Hindi, High Urdu and Pure Panjabi as a mark of otherness. In the phase of language transition, particularist loyalties of several language organisations are not necessarily inconsistent with national loyalties. The very nature of language politics permits a special degree of flexibility. Movements such as the promotion of Bhojpuri and Maithili within a larger Hindi amalgam for national aspirations, and of Panjabi in Pakistan within the 'national' Urdu amalgam for claiming Islamic solidarity are examples of adjustments that plural societies make for achieving their aims.

Tribal conglomerations with various shades of Bhili amalgam in Rajasthan, Madhya Pradesh, Gujarat and Maharashtra carry traits similar to the Hindi amalgam. This

also presents a typical case of many Bhili vernaculars showing signs of togetherness for claiming 'scheduled' privileges, but on the other hand, a few varieties of Bhili assert their distinction as a mark of *otherness* (notably Minas in Rajasthan; and Rathwa and Chaudhari groups in Gujarat).

The phenomenon of vacillation in language claims in the Census has been viewed as a mark of language plurality, a characteristic strength of the Fluid Zone i.e. the Hindi-Urdu-Panjabi belt of North-Central India. Earlier studies on language demography by the author (1983, 1991, 2001) discuss in detail how different elicitation and classification techniques influence language data and help us to gain insights of the underlying fuzzy reality that can be explained through an analogy of the "tip of an iceberg".

Evolving Lingua Francas

Many Asian and African nations organise their language communication on the basis of historic organic plurality built on the respect for liaison among diverse language groups. This phenomenon can lead to the emergence of *lingua francas* in respective regions. Plural societies are generally endowed with an access to a wider verbal repertoire for inter-group and inter-cultural communications. By and large, people belonging to oral cultures are not conscious of the speech characteristics which bind them to one language or which place them across the neighbouring boundary, as reported in the case of tribal communities in Ganjam "speaking both Oriya and Telugu, without distinguishing which to return as their mother tongue".

Members of such plural groups generally interact in everyday life situations without fully committing themselves to learn the 'tradition-inspired' standardised nuances of another language or culture; thereby evolving *lingua francas*

in different regions such as Hindustani in South Asia, Nagamese in North-East India and Swahili in East Africa. Linguistic characteristics of a *lingua franca* namely, respect for variation, loan-proneness (a great susceptibility towards transfers/borrowings from the languages available in a situation) and synergic efforts to 'get by' the pedantic nuances need not be congruent to those required for developing distinct languages for literature and for identity gratification. This phenomenon induces hybridisation, neutralisation, i.e. meeting of 'own' and 'contact' language on a common ground, 'unstructured' blending patterns of code-switching, grassroots bilingualism, compartmentalised diglossia and so on.

Hindustani, though linguistically not very different from pedantic high Hindi and high Urdu, is a diametrically distinct communication system. Hindustani is much more than a language in the narrow technical sense; it is a communication amalgam. Individuals in such societies acquire more synergy and serendipity and develop positive attitudes to variations in speech (to the extent of even appropriating deviations as the norm), in the process of 'coming out' from their individual language codes to a neutral ground such as in the case of Hindustani and Angrezi (Khubchandani 1997: 94). In view of this, the communicative assets of Hindi/Hindustani as a contact language are quite distinct from the heritage pulls of mother tongue Hindi. A seemingly incoherent manifestation in these societies makes some sense when coalescing into a persuasive whole almost in spite of disparate elements.

In this process, some regions develop local creolised languages like Sadri/Sadani, Kurmalī (hybrid forms of Bihari and Mundari, in Bihar), Halabi (a hybrid of Chhatisgarhi, Marathi and Gondi in Madhya Pradesh), and Nagamese (a hybrid of Assamese and Naga languages, in

Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh), as *lingua francas* for inter-group contact. About twelve percent tribals speak certain hybrid language varieties having an Indo-Aryan or Dravidian base. There are also signs of grassroots bilingualism (i.e. diglossic complementation) emerging within a group on the scale of age, gender, urbanity, modernity, status and solidarity (discussed in detail in Chapter 6).

Moving away from the tribal world, one is struck by another phenomenon of urban contact in South Asia where former colonial English is profusely sprinkled with Indian languages in 'cosmopolitan' repertoires. There are many workers in Indian ship yards who speak 'Shipee' English and many domestics in clubs and tourist places who use 'Butler' English as a means of earning bread and enhancing their career opportunities.

In this context, one cannot ignore the rapidly growing phenomenon characterised as 'passive smoking' of English in the urban milieu where individuals passively 'get by' with rudiments of English without having access to the active command of the language. Many informal exchanges in urban settings are marked by heterogeneous discourses where one 'comfortably' handles the message delivered in English but finds it more convenient to respond in another language common in the repertoire (frequently noticed in Indian Parliament proceedings).

The metamorphosis in the non-native speech creates a distinct profile on the 'alien' soil (or in multilingual forums), which may or may not be intimately connected to the native model. Angrezi in different hues and colours as a pan-Indian urban *lingua franca* is variedly mocked as *Indlish*, *Punlish*, *Tamlish* or *Banglish*. This reflects how the colonial is transformed in the shape of the local; its vigour is derived from the local appropriation of the dominant code, i.e.

British English. Conversely, Urdu/Hindustani can be taken as an instance of the dominant culture of the rulers of medieval times (identified with Arabic, Turkish and Persian) appropriating the local Hindi, presently known as Khariboli.

An apt analogy would be that of contrasting the difference between the solidifying of water in an ice-tray (similar to the bounds of a tradition) and the transforming of water molecules into snowflakes (i.e., crystallising, melting and re-crystallising). Referring to the dialectics of the theory of chaos, contemporary physicists point out:

When solidification proceeds from outside to inside, as in an ice-tray, the boundary generally remains stable and smooth, its speed controlled by the ability of the walls to draw away the heat. But when a crystal solidifies outward from an initial seed -- as a snowflake does -- grabbing water molecules while it falls through the moisture-laden air, the process becomes unstable". It is called the *lightning-rod effect*, a delicate balance between forces of stability and forces of instability; a powerful interplay of forces on atomic scales and forces on everyday scales (Gleick 1987: 309).

English profiles in Indian tropics are as varied as snowflakes; these reveal distinct *Ausbau* tendencies of cross-cultural fertilisations in the plurilingual milieu. In these situations the heritage dimension of English (an essential 'ice-tray' bounding of tradition in repertoires of native speakers) is rather weak; and the content of non-native speakers' 'liaison' Angrezi (that is, outward 'multi-fid snowflakes' to which they get exposed) is characterised by specific institutional and economic pressures.² It would be

² In this perspective, one should take cognisance of the hegemony of global English pushed by *power* equations, it will be relatively less stable when compared to the communitarian ethos in a plural society. It can result into a backlash favouring indigenous languages, as is

interesting to watch developments in the content and the functions of English in the coming years. At the same time, we also need to take into account the overdose of *ingrijikaran* or 'Englishization' in Indian languages as a pan-Indian feature that finds more acceptance in public domains for relaxed communication.

Political Dimension

Plural speech communities, by definition, cannot be 'monogamous' in language use as they tend to falter on the test of loyalty, whether it is to their mother tongue, to their heritage language, to the language for interaction or for mobility, or to the cyber medium. Such divided loyalties seriously affect the corpus as well as the status of a language under consideration. Heterogeneous media also threatens the autonomous functioning of different languages, dominant or dominated (Khubchandani 2001). Communication patterns in the public domains reveal that the trends of globalisation in mass media and information technology have intensified this diversity.

One significant casualty of these developments has been the threat to monolingualism in specific regions. The monopoly of one language dictating the concerns of a speech group (whether majority or minority), or of a nation, is declining or is getting considerably diluted. These developments have led to the questioning of the parameters of "linguistic homogeneity based on absolute majority of dominant speech groups" which formed the basis of the

evident from a recent revival of Swedish language indicative of a renewed pride in Swedish identity since Sweden's entry in the European Union (Oakes 2005): "Globalisation pushes forward global English hegemony, but in doing so it creates its own antithesis: Globalisation 'politicises' the language issue and hence 'potentialises' a reaction" (Sonntag 2003: 123).

linguistic re-organisation of the Indian states in 1956. Since then, due to various political pressures there have been many compromises in implementing this principle in the federal polity, particularly while re-organising the political set up of North-Eastern India.

During the Independence struggle, it was rather naively assumed that the states based on the principle of linguistic homogeneity would provide a common bond among citizens and a convenient measure for better administration. This assumption goes contrary to the sociolinguistic realities signified by *kshetras* as a characteristic of Indian heritage. Emotional stresses and strains in the new post-colonial order are evident in the unresolved disputes between constituent states in federal India as well as in agitations for safeguarding or granting economic and socio-cultural privileges to the 'sons of the soil'.

Tribals representing Tibeto-Burman languages, though constituting a smaller section of the total tribal population in the country, are marked by exclusive domination in most parts of the North-East (for details, see Chapter 6). All languages affiliated to tribals in the region are exposed to various contemporary institutions in diverse socio-cultural, educational and mass media settings. In Assam and Tripura, where the speakers of tribal languages form a 'powerful' minority, they are now becoming quite conscious of their ancestral dominance which they had in the region till not a long time ago when Ahom kings ruled over the region.³

The Bodo group of Tibeto-Burman family is diffused over a vast area in the Assam plains up to the foothills of Bhutan. At one time their use extended to south-east Bengal, now in

³ Chatterji (1978) points out: "Speakers of the Sino-Tibetan languages of Mongoloid origin are considered to have penetrated the Indian frontiers before the advent of the Aryans into India. They have been referred to in the oldest Sanskrit literature as *Kiratas*".

Bangladesh. The pidgin Garo, called Barish, was used as a contact language among the tribals in the region. "This very extensive Bodo bloc is, however, broken up due to the intrusion of the Aryan Assamese and Bengali" (Chatterji 1978).

Among the tribes affiliated to the Bodo ancestry, Garo, Rabha and Koch groups (590 thousand) form a majority in four of the seven districts in Meghalaya, and Tripuri speakers along with their allied communities (Reang, Noatia, Jamatia) (695 thousand) are concentrated in Tripura. With the continued influx of non-tribal migrations from neighbouring states (particularly across the border from Bangladesh), the share of Tripuri speaking population in Tripura has shrunk from 41 percent in 1911 to 39 percent in 1931 to 23 percent in 1971. During the six decades between the years 1901 to 1961 there was nearly a four-fold increase in the total population in the state whereas the non-tribal population during the same period increased nine-fold (Dutta 1969).

Despite the 'ongoing' re-organisation of states, the heterogeneous cultural mosaic of the North-East called the 'seven sisters', still continues to pose a challenge to those who are striving for solutions based on a strict adherence to the western model of homogeneity. First the Garos along with the Khasis, claimed autonomy by getting a separate state Meghalaya carved out from Assam. Later, two other prominent tribal groups of the North-East, the Nagas and the Mizos, after a long-drawn agitation succeeded in acquiring a degree of autonomy in the federal set up. Nagaland and Mizoram with much smaller populations have been granted the status of separate states where they constitute an absolute majority; 85 percent in Nagaland, and 94 percent in Mizoram. The truncated Assam has been

resenting the demands of further splits raised under the banners of Udayachal, Bodoland and so on.

The most numerous tribe speaking Bodo (estimated over 1.6 million in 1991), along with Mikir (366 thousand), and other allied languages – Rabha (139 thousand), Dimasa (89 thousand), Lalung (34 thousand), Deori (18 thousand) and others in the same sub-family – comprise over two millions (however, they constitute merely five to six percent of the total population of the entire state of Assam). Bodo-Kachari, Pidgin Garo, was one time a *lingua franca* among the tribals in the Assam plains. Because of the demographic dispersal of Bodos in the Brahmaputra valley and their intense interaction with the mainstream culture, a majority of them are now sucked into the Hindu caste system and have adopted Assamese as a complementary language. Till recently, they had joined hands with the Assamese youth in the struggle against ‘foreigners’.

Due to the recent political reform with its focus on ‘homogenising’ autonomy, the Bodos were left bereft of any autonomy in the new ‘homogenised’ political set up. Rather late in waking up, they have become vigilant about their demands of autonomy in tribal areas guaranteed under the Constitution of India. Charged with the feeling of a distinct identity, they now assert their share to participate in the political and developmental processes of the region. In 2003, the Bodo language was accorded recognition in the Eighth Schedule of the Indian Constitution.

Later, at the turn of the century, three more regions marked by cultural diversity have been granted statehood in the Hindi-speaking region: Uttarakhand, identifying the Pahari Himalayan terrain, has been separated from Uttar Pradesh; Jharkhand and Chhattisgarh with a concentration

of Austric-Dravidian tribes, are separated from Bihar and from Madhya Pradesh respectively.⁴

These political reforms accorded belated recognition to the aspirations of different tribal groups that identified with the cultural linguistic synthesis. These struggles should prompt us to re-examine the concept of homogeneity as the sole criteria of organising political states. Instead, it is necessary to seek for solutions in the composite plurality of traditional *kshetras* (cf. Chapter 2). In this light, distinctions between socio-political categories like majority/minority speech communities, strong/weak languages or languages with a widespread or restrictive canvas need to be critically evaluated.

⁴ It is ironical to note that in 1956 the States Reorganisation Commission had originally rejected the demand of Jharkhand state, citing 'language heterogeneity' of the region as one of the grounds.

Tribal Pathos

*Adivasi Vedanaa**

Measures of protective discrimination have given emergence to several schisms among them (the Bhils). Those who have succeeded in exploiting the benefit, due to them have amassed wealth and positions of power and influence It will not be wrong to say that the Bhil exploiters and oppressors for the Bhils themselves are more ruthless and callous when compared with the non-tribal exploiters. There are dikers or chokhiyars among the Bhils themselves.

(Doshi 1997)

In the midst of cultural and linguistic heterogeneity of the Indian subcontinent, many tribal communities are gradually opening up for intense interaction with the non-tribal world. With the pressures of democratisation, economic mobility and mass media exposure, the lifestyles and communication patterns of these isolated communities are going through a rapid change as they participate in modern institutions, such as literacy drives, industrial employment, urbanisation and elections.

In the Image of the ‘Other’

With the advent of colonialism two centuries ago, the term ‘tribe’ acquired a pejorative sense: “a race of people in a

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primitive or barbarous condition” – the aborigines. The Indian term *adivasi*, *vanavasi*, *janajati*, *janajamati* also carry a similar connotation.

The colonial practice of depicting the tribal as a “sub-human being, fully deprived of the attributes of a civilised life”, has resulted in many stereotypes. It led to treating tribals as museum specimens to be observed for anthropological examination and analysis (for a perceptive summary of these features, cf. Mamoria 1957: 35-46). Brahminical literature also shows a marked scorn of caste-Hindus for the wretched of the earth; the *adivasi* is described as “shabby looking, ugly, rustic and uncivilised man who eats the flesh of dead animals and does not hesitate to kill a cow and relish its flesh” (Doshi 1997: 260). This ‘outsider’s view of the tribal society singles out aboriginals from the mainstream on the basis of various ethno-centric parameters, namely their physical characteristics, linguistic affiliations, cultural contact, occupation and territorial distribution.

In an attempt to adopt a classification criterion for identifying Scheduled Tribes, the Indian Commissioner for Scheduled Tribes in the early 1950s sought suggestions from different states to indicate prominent characteristics that distinguish these communities from others. Anthropologically, it makes an interesting account to note the varying criteria explicated by provincial governments and coloured by colonial thinking to identify the tribal population (Shrikant 1952):

Table 3: Statewise Tribal Traits

Assam	(a) descent from Mongoloid stock, (b) member of the Tibeto-Burman linguistic groups, and (c) existence of a unit of social organisation of the village-clan type
West Bengal	residing in jungle and of tribal origin
Orissa	of pre-Dravidian or Mongoloid racial origin
Madhya Bharat	of tribal origin, speaking a tribal language, and resident of forest areas
Bhopal	habitation in remote jungle and hill districts; nomadism, hunting and gathering of forest fruits as the primary means of subsistence
Vindhya Pradesh	dark skin, flat nose, preference for fruits, roots and animal flesh, rather than foodgrains; the use of bark and leaves of trees as clothes on ceremonial occasions; nomadism, witch-doctoring and worship of ghosts and spirits
Bombay	residence in forest areas
Hyderabad	residence in jungles, animistic religion, the use of local dialect, forcible marriage, hunting, fishing and gathering of forest food as the main means of subsistence
Madras	primitive tribal way of life and residence in less easily accessible hills and in remote interior forests, with little or no contact with other population groups
Mysore	habitation in remote hilly tracts in the jungle
Travancore	habitation in the jungle, practising tribal religion and bearing certain racial or cultural characteristics

Many Indian development agencies in post-colonial times still guided by such bourgeois values, by and large attribute the following stereotypes to tribals: indication of ‘primitive’ traits, distinctive cultures, geographical isolation, shyness of contact and economic backwardness (Lokur Committee 1965).

Self Image

In objective terms, the ‘tribal psyche’ can be understood in terms of their cultural and linguistic identity in the Indian

context (cf. Chapter 1). In this regard, Mohan (1986) associates occupational pursuits of hunting and gathering among tribal communities with tribal dialects and of subsistence farming with non-tribal vernaculars. Illich's (1981) characterisation of 'vernacular economy' and 'capitalised language' shows a strong co-relation between language loyalty and socio-economic status. This linguistic transition is closely associated with socio-economic transition:

The settled village farmer in Bihar, Madhya Pradesh, Bengal and Orissa often has a nomadic forest-tribal ancestry, recent or remote: thus in such areas 'tribal' is less of racial or ethnic category than a statement of present-day language loyalty and socio-economic lifestyle (Mohan *op. cit.*).

This characteristic is enumerated in Schedule Nine of the Indian Constitution. No doubt, several other socio-cultural factors, namely population size and traditions of hostilities or alliances among different groups operate in a plural society, that affect the language loyalty in a significant manner (cf. Chapter 2).

There are positive and negative elements as components of the tribal consciousness. Every group comes to terms with the multi-faceted reality in its own unique manner. There is no fixed recipe for the 'correct' blend. Many individuals and groups learn to live with contradictions through processes such as syncretism (a happy mix, it may not be so rational), compartmentalisation and assimilation.¹

¹ In the context of development, particularly for chalking out the programmes of adult education among oral cultures, Goodluck discussed different approaches which can be grouped under two sub-heads: (i) *domesticating* approaches such as annihilation, assimilation, integration, and (ii) *liberating* approaches such as self-reliance, participatory impetus, peoples' power, mutual cooperation (1981).

It is a sad reality that in the contemporary milieu, the relationship between small and big cultural identities is not organised on reciprocity. The 'big' cultures all round the world, supported by enormous political and economic advantages, tend to carry inherent tendencies which stand radically against the basic intentions of fair communication. The tendency to obtain supremacy over weaker groups and to be hegemonistic, is subtly present even in their care of patronising 'small' cultures. Such a climate carries the seeds of small cultural entities becoming defensive for protection of their identities through the demands of equality and parity in a homogenous situation. Elwin calls such tendency "as posing our own ideas of guilt and punishment on the tribal people (1959: 161). Commenting upon the perpetual hostilities in the North-East, Rustomji observes:

Nothing gives rise to so much anger, hostility, even hatred, as the apprehension of cultural aggression Much of the discord on the borders is a reaction to this attitude of patronising condescension.... The failure has been for the most part, not so much in intention as in empathy and sensitivity (1983).

At the same time, a 'small' culture carries within it the potential of contributing to the larger ethos. Every culture, irrespective of being big or small (in demographic/economic terms), serves as a bridge between others and as an instrument of interaction which is humanly universal. It will, therefore, be a mistake to regard tribal communities as small territorial groups which can be regulated by coercive power of the State. Gandhiji rightly observes that "we must approach the tribes man with the mind of the tribesman".

Dynamics of Acculturation

Let us view the profiles of a few prominent tribal communities to see how they have responded to numerous challenges in history.

Bhils, one of the largest conglomerations of tribals in central India, have undergone a complete metamorphosis over the centuries. They belong to the Aryan origin and are concentrated in areas surrounding the Aravalli Hills and Western Ghats. The Bhili region, popularly known as Bhilbhoomi, constitutes an area extending from southern Rajasthan to eastern Gujarat, covering north-west Madhya Pradesh upto northern Maharashtra.

Grierson's *Linguistic Survey of India* (vol. IX: III) has classified Bhili/Bhilodi and Khandeshi (Ahirani) as belonging to the Central group of Indo-Aryan family. Their many dialectal variations have mixed characteristics from the Dravidian and Munda stock of languages. Bhils claim several distinct identities nurtured in isolation from one another. Prominent groups of this conglomeration, incorporated as 'Scheduled Tribes', include the Bhil, Garasia, Mina, Damor, Kawar, Naikda, Varli, Kokna, Gamit, Dhodia, Dubla, Kol, Kolidhangar, Seharia, Rathwa, Dhanka, Chaudhri and Kathodi communities. The Bhili conglomeration numbers over 21 million, nearly a quarter of the total tribal population of 87 million (2001 Census).

Bhils claim a proud heritage of warriors, sharing many rich tales in Indian mythology. In Puranic literature, they are referred to as *Nishads* and are mentioned in the stories of Eklavya in *Mahabharata* and Shabri Bhilni in *Ramayana*. Linking their heritage with *adikavi* Valmiki, they are known for their rich folklore. The epic *Bhilon nu Bharat*, a Bhili version of the *Mahabharata* compiled by Bhagwandas Patel along with Gujarati and Hindi renderings (1994, 1996), and pictorial depictions of Baba Pithoro among Rathwa Bhils

(Devy 2002) are classic examples of the rich oral tradition and history of the Bhils (Omvedt 2004). The Bhils associate their ancestry with King Porus who valiantly fought against Alexander, Chandragupta Maurya and Vikramaditya of Ujjain.

During the medieval times, Bhils lived in the forests in small clusters and ruled over small principalities in the Rajputana hills (Todd 1914). They inter-married with Rajputs and were privileged to perform *rajtilak* for Rajput rulers. Stories of their valour are sung describing the battle of Haldighati, fought on behalf of Rana Pratapsingh of Mewad against the Moghul king Akbar. There are accounts of Kolis, Garasias, and Minas, confronting King Aurangzeb at Khandesh in the 1660s. Bhils also fought battles against the Maratha Peshwas.

During the early nineteenth century when the British were getting a foothold over Rajputana, Bhils carried out intensive battles with bows and arrows against the intruders and against the Rajput princes who had sided with the British. After losing the battles, Bhils were driven to interior forests and were thus deprived of their ancestral lands. The British, after earning truce with Bhils, created eight Bhili squads in the Indian Army.

The 'mainstream' accounts of the Indian freedom struggle against the British do not record much the heroic confrontations led by Bhils in the region. Notably in the 1857 rebellion, Tantya Tope commanded rebel forces from Kanpur along with the Rani of Jhansi. Later, at the turn of the century, Tejawat of Gujarat, known as Govind Guru, launched a peaceful movement from Dungarpur through spiritual congregations called *sampa sabha*, as a forum for sabotaging the British and the Indian princes' rule. In a way, this was the forerunner of Lokmanya Tilak's movement for cultural awareness, the *Ganeshotsav* that began from Pune.

In December 1908, the British tried to crush the movement by carrying out a massacre of all pilgrims participating in the *mela* at Mangadh hills in Banswara. A decade later, a similar inhuman slaughter was repeated at Jalianwala Bagh in Punjab. Around the same time, Bijolia Bhil launched a successful non-co-operation movement against *chaunri kar* or marriage tax from Sirohi that drew the attention of Mahatma Gandhi.

Such chequered responses of human ecology in history, have created a deep cleavage in the Bhil identity. Many of the Bhils, bereft of their forest lands, have dwellings in scattered *pals* or “spread out house-clusters in remote villages”. Struggling against the wall, they have been living in abject impoverished conditions. On the other hand, continuous migrations of Bhils to the plains have transformed their social structure. These ‘acculturated’ Bhils settled in towns and surrounding pockets, have been swarmed by mainstream pressures as seen among Hinduised *bhagats* and Christian Bhils in Rajasthan. A few sections of urbanised Bhils also show attachment to the Jain Tirthankar, Rishabh Deo.

On the contemporary scene, the processes of ‘modernisation’ have further widened the gulf and many of the Bhils tend to alienate themselves from the Bhili way of life:

While the forest Bhils cling to their age-old ethnicity and suffer from deprivation – economic and social; the Bhils inhabiting the plains suffer from the loss of ethnic nerve – a kind of crisis in their tribal identity (Doshi 1997: 229).

Along with urban life styles, Bhils have also switched over to speaking Marwari/Hindi or to Gujarati/Marathi. In the 1991 Census, only 13 percent Minas claimed the retaining of Bhili as their mother tongue.

Bhils in Gujarat are to a large extent integrated with Gujarati society and claim Gujarati as their mother tongue. Some Bhils living in the Dangs claim Khandeshi/Ahirani as their mother tongue. At the same time, the use of ancestral 'ethnic' languages as Rathwi, Chaudhari, Dehwali, Vasava and Varli etc. is a common feature in home surroundings and in cultural domains of tribal communities, referred to as 'egalitarian' bilingualism (Chapter 4).

In Rajasthan, 40 percent Bhils reported Wagdi, a tribal vernacular of Rajasthani as their mother tongue in the 1971 Census; other Rajasthani dialects claimed were Mewari 21, Khariboli 19, Marwari 14, Harauti 2, Malvi 1, negligible numbers of Dhundhari and another Indo-Aryan language Sindhi (1972 Census Handbook). But in the 1991 Census, 31 percent Bhils claimed Bhili (instead of Wagdi) as their mother tongue and 66 percent classified themselves as Hindi speakers without giving specific dialect particulars.

In Maharashtra, Bhili is retained by only 14 percent Bhils; 65 percent have switched over to Marathi language in 1991. Also, 5 percent Garasias claimed Khandeshi as their mother tongue. Bhils in Madhya Pradesh are strongly linked to their ancestral language (57 percent); two percent claim Korku and a negligible number claims Korwa, both Austric languages, as their mother tongues (1991 Census).

The Central Belt: Area of Convergence

The entire central belt of India extending from Madhya Pradesh to Andhra Pradesh, covering Orissa to West Bengal, and more particularly areas of Chhatisgarh and Jharkhand, is known as the convergence area which traces the histories of Indo-Aryan, Dravidian and Austric languages co-existing and converging over the centuries. Emeneau (1956) identifies this phenomena as the unique linguistic area; Pandit (1972) and Khubchandani (1993) describe the entire

Indian sub-continent as a *sociolinguistic area*, focussing on the symbiotic networks that evolved among language groups belonging to more than one family – a typical feature of Indian communication ethos (cf. Chapter 4). In the context of tribal languages, Reddy presents a detailed account of the processes of convergence in the central belt (2005).

Successive migrations of different tribes from the Austric Mundas (including Santals, Hos, and Kharias) to the Dravidian Gonds and Oraons since pre-historical times have led to a composite tribal consciousness particularly in the Chotanagpur plateau and adjoining areas. In this process, many tribal communities show the traits of retaining their ancestral languages along with the domineering influences of regional languages of the Central belt such as Hindi, Oriya, Bengali and Telugu.

Gond Community

1. As per the 1971 Census, the Gonds of Dravidian ancestry show signs of language assimilation in Madhya Pradesh by their favouring of Hindi (49 percent; in addition, 13 percent Chhatisgarhi – a vernacular of Hindi); Gondi is retained by only 30 percent tribals. In 1991, Hindi claims in Madhya Pradesh increased to 74 percent; also 2.4 percent tribals claimed Halabi, an Indo-Aryan hybrid language as their mother tongue.
2. In erstwhile Bihar, mainly in the Jharkhand region, the 1971 Census records show that 37 percent Gonds have switched over to Oriya, 30 percent to Sadani (a Hindi hybrid vernacular), 22 percent to Hindi, 5 percent to Bhojpuri and with a negligible number speaking Kurukh, Magahi and Chhatisgarhi.
3. In Orissa, only 3.3 percent Gonds retained Gondi as their mother tongue in 1991; they have largely switched over

to Oriya (74 percent) and to Koya, another Dravidian language (14 percent).

4. In Andhra Pradesh, tribals continue to show preference for their ancestral language (52 percent, in 1971); in 1991, ancestral language claims increased to 64 percent; switching over to the regional language Telugu by 33 percent, and with only one percent moving over to neighbouring Marathi.
5. In Maharashtra, Gonds showed a strong attachment to their mother tongue (Gondi 67 percent). But in 1991, Gondi claims are reduced to 29 percent; 65 percent Gonds switched over to Marathi and 4.3 percent to Hindi as their mother tongue.
6. Gonds in Karnataka are largely assimilated to Kannada and only a few claim Marathi and Tamil as their mother tongues.

Oraon Community

Another community of Dravidian origin, the Oraons living in the erstwhile Bihar–Jharkhand region shows signs of retaining their ancestral language Kurukh (48 percent, in 1991); 2.3 percent have switched over to Mundari, an Austric language.

1. In Madhya Pradesh, Oraons show a definite preference to retain their ancestral language Kurukh (65 percent, in 1991); a negligible number claims Gondi, another Dravidian language (0.4 percent).
2. In Orissa, the Oraon community shows preference for Oriya (44 percent, 1991 Census).
3. In West Bengal, Kurukh was claimed as mother tongue by 69 percent in 1971, but this was reduced to 32 percent in 1991. Pan-Indian Hindi is claimed by 41 percent and

the regional language Bengali only by 18 percent (1991 Census).

Perpetual Struggles

Tribal populations in the Central-east region, particularly in Jharkhand, are interspersed with several craft-castes of Indo-Aryan origin (many of them are notified as ‘Scheduled Castes’ in the Constitution), known as Sadans. In a village hierarchy the Sadans, originally alien settlers called *diku* (*di* “that” + *-ku* “plural”, “those people”), occupy ranks lower than the tribal peasantry (Sinha *et al* 1969). In a gradual process of acculturation a relation of interdependence has developed between tribals, the Sadans and the Jolhas (backward Muslims). Eventually, Sadri/Sadani, a creolised vernacular of Hindi with a base in Bhojpuri and Magahi, developed as a *contact* language for inter-tribal communication. Intensive interaction through Sadri (also called Nagpuria) among tribals has further led to its adoption as one of the mother tongues in an organically plural milieu. Vernacular literature has also blossomed in Sadani.

Later, migrations of feudal settlers led by the relationship of subjugation and dominance since the Moghul rule, resulted in a kind of resentment toward the *diku* or “the outsider class” in general.

During the nineteenth century several uprisings took place in the Centre-East to fight against the exploitative practices of the *dikus*, such as the *Kol Bidroh*, the *Santal Hul* (1855), the *Chaur Rebellion* of Midnapore, the *Sardar Larai* (1870-85), the *Birsa Andolan* (1899) and the *Jatra Oraon*. These struggles at the turn of the century have given birth to a composite over-riding identity associated with the region in alliance with the Sadans, along with their specific in-group identities as the Munda, Santal, Oraon and so on.

The activities of Christian missionaries asserting 'alternate' values of life brought in a degree of socio-cultural alienation in the traditional tribal lifestyles. Missionaries were the first to introduce literacy among the tribes of the Chotanagpur region as early as the nineteenth century. Initially, they were content with the educational advancement of the converts to the extent of reading the Bible, as is borne out by the following sequence of events: the Gossner Evangelical Lutheran Mission was the first to settle down in Chotanagpur in 1845; the foundation of the big Church at Ranchi was laid in 1852; the Theological College was established in 1874; the first primary school was started in 1890; but the first graduate college was opened at Ranchi after a long gap, in 1945 (Minz 1987).

At first, these conversions gave a serious jolt to the tribal consciousness. But later the new challenges of identity seem to have reinforced the processes of cultural synthesis cutting across tribals of all faiths (Hindu, Christian, Sanatan Dharmi, animist), of different descents – Austric and Dravidian with a super-layer of Indo-Aryan. This synthesis of three language families found expression in the aspirations of the Jharkhand movement initiated in the 1920s and aptly described by Ram Dayal Munda (1989) (cf. Chapter 4).

In Jharkhand (erstwhile Bihar), the 1991 Census records a large number of tribal communities belonging to Austric ancestry claiming respective ancestral languages as their mother tongue: 92 percent Santals claimed Santali as their language, 94 percent Hos claimed Ho as their language, 53 percent Mundas claimed Mundari as their mother tongue. In Orissa, 89 percent Santals and in West Bengal 88 percent people claimed Santali as their mother tongue.

In a milieu characterised by cultural synthesis, many Austric communities, though in small numbers, record their loyalty to other tribal languages – Austric, Dravidian and

the Indo-Aryan *lingua franca* Sadani in Jharkhand and to Desiya in Orissa:

Two percent Santals show affinity to Dravidian language Maltopaharia, six percent Mundas to Dravidian Kurukh, seven percent Kharwars to another Austric language Santali, 2.3 percent Kurukhs in Jharkhand speak Mundari, an Austric language, as their mother tongue.

Munda emerges as a widely used language in the region: 20 percent Kolhas in Orissa speak Munda (apart from 49 percent claiming Ho). In West Bengal, 13 percent Bhumijis speak another Austric language, Munda. In reverse, 3 percent Mundas speak Santali. In Orissa, 25 percent Dravidian Khonds speak Kui, remaining Khonds are assimilated to Oriya (18 percent) and to Hindi (2 percent).

Tenacity to Survive

All tribals do not have a common ancestry as such. The tenacity to survive in perpetual struggles of discrimination from the powerful sections of society equips the 'peoples of ecosystems,' the *adivasis*, with certain common traits to meet the challenges of modern life. These characteristics are broadly identified as the 'tribal mind set'. One can gain insights into the present day crisis among tribals, the *adivasi vedana* or 'the tribal pathos', by recapitulating the interaction networks among tribals and non-tribals sustained during the past few centuries (presented in Khubchandani 1992a):

1. Against all socio-economic odds, tribals persist with a parallel system, managing their lifestyles outside the mainstream, in keeping with the kinship principles of their historical identity. A kind of symbiotic relationship, evolved between the indigenous population and later

settlers, manifests itself in the process of re-defining themselves in relation to one another.

2. Tribals became first the targets of the 'missionary solution' which de-tribalised their rituals, customs and morals. These processes of *missionisation* set in motion alternate values of life against their traditional beliefs. The seeds of de-tribalisation were sown by introducing them to the rudiments of literate cultures through the translation of the Bible and gospels in their ancestral languages.
3. The insidious *Sanskritisation* to which tribals are subjected to by Hindu institutions tend to place them in a caste-ridden social structure that is alien to them. These changes are mainly a reaction to the missionary forces which are incompatible with their traditional egalitarian ethos.
4. The processes of indigenisation have given birth to many reform movements during the past two hundred years. Intermittent uprisings against the forces of subjugation and exploitation discussed above offer a glimpse of the tribals' determination to preserve the core of their identity, while making efforts to break away from their tradition-bound superstitious ways of life (Basu 1990).
5. The British rulers followed the policy of segregation under the garb of 'protectionism' of excluded and partially excluded areas; tribals were associated with primitiveness and the task of defining their direction of change was delegated to colonial administrators, guided by the theory of isolation (Haimendorf 1939).
6. A significant transformation in the tribal life has come through the recent interventions of development agencies. One of the magnetic pulls attracting solidarity among diverse tribal groups in post-colonial India under the banner of modernisation, hitherto isolated from one

another, has been to qualify for special privileges (such as reservations, subsidies, etc.) accorded under the provisions of the Indian Constitution.

History testifies that the tribals have suffered oppression and humiliation, exploitation and backwardness for centuries at the hands of super-ordinate groups – be they feudal or colonial powers, missionaries, high caste Hindus, money lenders or present day development workers and political leaders. A specimen from the compilation of folk songs poignantly expresses the charged feelings of adivasis towards non-adivasi outsiders, called *dikus* in the central region:

First the *diku* came as land grabbers,
The British colonisers as *diku* who ruled us,
Now we have these big industries and these townships.

Thus from individuals, the *dikus* have taken
The form of massive industries and industrialists,
And today in the form of development project
That destroy and make us their victims.

(English translation of Poem 78, ACAAIP 2001, cited in Chauhan 2009, 56)

A Critique of Development

As stated earlier, nearly four hundred tribal groups are listed in different state Schedules, as directed in the Constitution.² These tribes belong to varied ethno-linguistic

² The Scheduled Castes and Scheduled Tribes Orders (Amendment) Act of 1976 and other orders issued for individual states and Union Territories enumerate over 550 tribal groups. The Amendment Act has deleted about one hundred labels, incorporated in the Orders of 1950 and 1956, which after scrutiny were found to be sub-groups or mere variations of the same tribe. The number of tribes enumerated in each state is given in Khubchandani 1992a (Tables 9 and 10, pp. 26-28).

backgrounds (Chapter 1). In chalking out developmental plans, state agencies often treat them as a single entity or a single homogeneous monolithic block, referred by a single generic label of ‘Scheduled Tribes’.

The ‘development’ experience since Independence can be described as a mixed blessing for tribals. Through diverse networks of ‘hi fi’ development projects such as mining, deforestation, the construction of high dams on tribal lands and so on, tribals have become the first targets of the vandalising forces of modernisation; they have become economically destitute and marginalised (Khubchandani 2009).

In an anxiety to cope with such brutal experiences, the primitive complex of tribal communities is rapidly giving place to the minority complex (Roy Burman 1972). In this respect, the ‘acculturated’ tribal elite is a class of entrepreneurs benefiting from the discontent of their community members. The growing sense of insecurity, distrust of aliens – *the dikus* – and the simmering discontent since development benefits allocated in the name of tribals are unjustifiably passed on to non-tribals, are some of the significant symptoms of tribal restlessness. It finds expression in various socio-political agitations which at times have resorted to violence.

Extension of the 73rd and 74th Amendments of the Constitution to the Scheduled Areas through the Panchayat Act, 1996 ensures effective participation of tribals in the process of planning and decision making.

In the Scheduled lists, some tribal groups belong to more than one state (and Union Territories) such as two major tribes, Bhils (Indo-Aryan) and Gonds (Dravidian) recorded under many sub-groupings, are widely spread in the Centre-west, further extending to the South (Andhra Pradesh and Karnataka) and to the Centre-east regions; a substantial number of them have migrated to the North-East region (Tripura) as well.

The norms and values of one culture dominate the other through subjugation, colonisation or in the name of development, and these generate dissonance between the two or result in the assimilation of one culture, weaker in demographic or economic terms, with the other. Feelings of resentment against outsiders and their virtual rejection among a section of tribals indicate their uncertainty and a sense of helplessness regarding their future:

A Bhil may brave a tiger in forest, but is afraid to face even an insignificant outsider (Doshi 1971).

The cumulative effect of such 'insensitive' development plans pursued over the past six decades has been the creation of a *creamy layer* within many tribal communities which has infiltrated into contemporary political and bureaucratic infrastructures.

This creamy layer has been appropriating most of the rewards of reservations and other privileges provided for Scheduled Tribes in the Indian Constitution.³

In the socio-cultural realm as well, the values of 'secondary' modernisation throughout the developing world place a premium on an uncritical replacement of the traditional ethos, with an emphasis on trailing behind the path already taken by 'advanced' societies, as observed by Latin American philosopher Somavia:

The so-called primitive societies are supposed to reach the same level of well-being by simply copying and adapting here and there the forms, criteria, the mechanisms

³ Exposing the misplaced outcome of such programmes, Doshi (1997: 257) remarks with a tinge of sarcasm:

.....the more money is spent on the development of tribals, the better it is for the economic improvement of the implementing officials and their personnel and reverse is the lot of the so-called target groups (i.e. tribals).

through which the rich world had reached its affluence (1983).

To correct unilinear models of development, UNESCO drew attention to the multi-fid contexts of cultural development. When celebrating the World Decade for Cultural Development (1988-97), the proclamation seeks:

...to underscore the need to take local culture into account in the development process; to stress the importance of artistic creativity in a period of rapid scientific and technological change; to reinforce acceptance of cultural diversity in the interest of international peace and understanding.

Development expert Arturo Escobar shows how the 'Third World' is, in a sense, an invitation of a Western discourse on development:

Development in most parts of the world continues to be top down, ethnocentric, technocratic, and treats people and cultures as abstract concepts and statistical figures to be moved up and down in the charts of 'progress' (cited in Shekhawat 2001: 150).

It is sad that the initiative taken by Indian visionaries in the early fifties by propounding the *Panchsheel* doctrine of tribal development as spelt out by Nehru (cf. Chapter 1), has been honoured more by lip service than by its implementation.

At this critical juncture, it will be crucial to re-assess development targets and strategies with an open mind. Recently, the Brundtland Commission set up by the United Nations, stressed the need of building firm foundations based on integral sustainable development defined in terms of all round well-being of people, as the "*mantra* of 21st century". It envisages measuring progress by the indicators of the quality of life and happiness:

..... that meets the needs of the *present* without compromising the ability of the *future* generation to meet their own needs.

This herculean task beckons us to seriously consider the *adivasi* doctrine of Trusteeship which can pave the way for a new social order on an ethical plane (discussed in Chapter 1). It becomes imperative to strive for reversing the trends of large-scale commodification and homogenisation in favour of an integral and sustained development of humankind.

It is becoming increasingly evident that development targets, instead of looking for solutions for the downtrodden, are becoming a part of the problem itself. These failures have generated a sense of resurrection of tribal identity among many isolated communities. Along with the spread of education, this consciousness is gradually emanating on the national scene. Sharply reacting to such regressive results of development, a few human rights groups have become vigilant, initiating moves to promote *adivasikaran* or “tribalisation”. Such moves aim at preventing exploitation from inside as well as from outside as well as checking the onslaught of elitist *sanskritisation*. The movement is visualised as a tool for reaffirmation and a peaceful revival of indigenous cultures.

Instead of chasing the mirage of conflicting ideologies, participation of communities at the ‘grassroots’ level needs to be encouraged to empower them to tackle their ‘own’ problems with self-confidence and to become self-reliant (Devy 2006: 123-42). Many pre-modern traditions continue to live among the tribal societies even after being subjected to many transformations: “The modern hurricane of development has not been able to uproot them” (Patel 2004: 217).

Exploring a new paradigm of development can usher in an integrated holistic approach with a human face, built on mutual trust among different stakeholders (and not

canvassed as the “brown sahebs’ burden”). The paradigm should respect the folk perception of identifying socio-economic changes as a chain of continuities encompassing the glorious moments in people’s heritage and thus avoiding the pitfalls of conceiving development as a rupture in the cultural ethos of traditional societies in general and tribals in particular.

Tribal Landscape

Communities and Languages

How much finer things are in composition than alone.
(Ralph Emerson)

Tribals in India represent a precious heritage. Profiles of Indian tribals are as varied as the rest of India with communities belonging to different cultural strands and faiths. Having disparate living conditions, they also claim their distinct language identities. The bonds of cultural solidarity among various tribal groups have been reinforced in recent times by creation of a common stake through the privileges accorded to them in Schedule Nine of the Indian Constitution.

Language Families

Languages of India belong to four different families. Indo-European (Indo-Aryan and Dardic sub-families) comprises 74 percent of the country's total population; Dravidian constitutes 24 percent; Austric 1.2 percent and Sino-Tibetan (Tibeto-Burman sub-family) constitutes 0.6 percent. The entire population speaking Austric languages is classified as 'tribal'. Languages associated with tribals in other families account for – Tibeto-Burman about eighty percent, Dravidian nearly three percent and Indo-Aryan less than two percent.

The 2001 Census lists ninety-five tribal languages whose population is over ten thousand each. Two of these languages, Santali (Austric) and Bodo (Tibeto-Chinese) were added to Schedule Eight of the Indian Constitution in the

year 2000 that qualifies them for special attention in language development programs. The 1991 Census recorded eighty-nine, and the 1981 Census, eighty-one such languages.

The 1961 Census makes a complete listing of 'mother tongue' (MT) labels, classified under 128 languages, and based on Grierson's classification given in the *Linguistic Survey of India* (1905-1931) irrespective of their population size – 91 Tibeto-Burman languages (covering over 200 varying MT labels); 20 Austric languages (65 labels); 15 Dravidian languages (45 labels) and two Indo-Aryan languages (40 labels). Over forty MT labels were left unclassified.

In 2001, out of a total tribal population of 86.5 million the number of tribals identifying with their respective ancestral languages is estimated at 39.2 million (i.e. 44.4 percent). In 1991, these ancestral languages were claimed by 28.4 million, i.e. a share of 41.3 percent of the total tribal population of 64.9 million. In absolute terms, speakers of tribal languages show an increase of 10.8 million in 2001 and an increase of 6.1 million in 1991. The previous two decades also recorded a considerable growth in the claims of tribal languages: an increase of 3.9 million (from the total tribal population of 18.4 million) during 1971-81, and of 3.7 million (from the total of 14.7 million) during 1961-71. The population breakdown according to language families during the three decades from 1971 to 2001 is given in Table 4.

Grierson classifies languages of the Austric family in two groups – two languages of the Mon-Khmer group comprising nearly six percent speakers (Khasi over 1129 thousand in Meghalaya and Nicobarese over 29 thousand in Andaman and Nicobar Islands in 2001). The remaining languages, approximately 20 in number, belong to the Munda group spread in the Central-East region covering Bihar–

Jharkhand, Madhya Pradesh-Chhattisgarh and Andhra Pradesh in the south (about 10.3 million speakers in 2001). Prominent languages having over one hundred thousand population in 2001 include Santali, Mundari, Ho, Korku, Munda, Savara (Saora) and Kharia.

The whole of North-East India is dominated by the Tibeto-Burman family of languages (total speakers 8.8 million in 2001). The family is also spread in the sub-Himalayan range of North-Western India. Almost all speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages except those claiming Manipuri (1.5 million in 2001), are classified as Scheduled Tribes. Grierson (1903) and Schafer (1954) classify Tibeto-Burman family in eight groups. These are listed below along with their strength of speakers as claimed in the 1991 Census:

1. Bodo sub-family: 3300 thousand (10 languages – Bodo, Garo, Tripuri, Mikir, Rabha, Dimasa, Lalung, Deori, Koch, Mech), spread in the Brahmaputra Valley, North Cachar Hills in Assam, Meghalaya and Tripura
2. Naga sub-family: 1230 thousand (24 languages) in Nagaland, Arunachal Pradesh, and North Manipur Hills
3. Kuki-Chin sub-family (with the exclusion of Manipuri), 920 thousand (25 languages), in Manipur and Tripura
4. NEFA sub-family: 850 thousand (5 languages), in Arunachal Pradesh and North Assam
5. Bhotia sub-family: 120 thousand (9 languages), in Central and Western Sub-Himalayan Range
6. Himalayan sub-family: 12 thousand (14 languages), in Sikkim, West Bengal, Uttar Pradesh and Himachal Pradesh
7. Burma sub-family: 8 thousand (two languages) and

8. Kachin sub-family: 28 thousand (two languages); both sub-families namely (7 and 8), are spoken adjacent to the Burma border.

A small number of Khampti speakers (296 in 1961 Census), belonging to the Tai group of the Sino-Tibetan family is also located on the northern border of Assam.

**Table 4: Tribal Languages Speakers,
according to Language Families: 1971-2001**

Language Families	Number of Languages			Number of Speakers (millions)				Percentage of the Total Tribal Population			
	2001	1991	1981	2001	1991	1981	1971	2001	1991	1981	1971
Austrie	14	14	14	11.4	9.5	7.8	6.9	12.9	14.0	14.5	18
Tibeto-Burman	66	61	54	8.8	6.6	4.4	3.8	9.9	10.1	8.2	9
Dravidian	12	11	11	6.7	5.2	4.6	4.0	7.7	7.7	8.5	11
Indo-Aryan	3	3	2	12.3	7.1	5.4	3.7	13.9	10.5	10.1	10
Total	95	89	81	39.2	28.4	22.3	18.4	14.4	41.3	41.3	49

(Languages claimed by less than ten thousand speakers each are not tabulated separately.)

Tribal languages of the Dravidian family comprise of three groups: two languages spoken by small populations in Tamil Nadu – Kota (862 claimants) and Toda (765) in 1961 – belong to the South Dravidian group; and nine languages with over 4.5 million speakers (in 2001) belong to the Central Dravidian group – Gondi, Kui, Koya, Khond, Parji, Coorgi, Kolami, Konda, Jatapu; and three languages with 2.1 million population are assigned to the North Dravidian group – Kurukh, Malto, and Kisan. These speakers are spread in the central belt from West Bengal to Maharashtra and to the south in Andhra Pradesh. The 1961 Census recorded two Dravidian *hybrid* languages – Bharia (249 claimants) in Madhya Pradesh and Ladhadi (305) in

Maharashtra – retained by a small number of speakers. There is another North Dravidian language, Brahui, located on the Sind-Baluchistan border in Pakistan.

Three Indo-Aryan languages – Bhili, Khandeshi and Halabi – enumerated as tribal, are concentrated in the Centre-west region; these together comprise about 12.3 million speakers (in 2001).

According to language families, the breakdown of tribal languages speakers in 2001 Census is as follows: 31 percent speakers identify with Indo-Aryan ancestry, 29 percent with Austric, 22 percent with Tibeto-Burman and 17 percent with Dravidian. There has been a considerable spurt in the claims of Indo-Aryan languages – 3.8 percent during the past twenty years (1981-2001), mainly due to the revival of Bhil identity and the changed status of Halabi that is now classified as an independent language instead of being treated as a dialect of Marathi till 1961. Tibeto-Burman languages have shown an increase of 1.7 percent during the same period. Conversely, the proportionate share of Austric languages is reduced by 1.6 percent and of Dravidian languages by 0.8 percent.

Population-wise, nine tribal languages (four Austric, two Indo-Aryan, two Dravidian and one Tibeto-Burman) are claimed by over one million speakers each in 2001 Census, comprising 27.2 million (nearly 70 percent of the total tribal population) enumerated in Table 5 (Category A). Bhili (Indo-Aryan) tops the list with nearly 10 million speakers, followed by Santali (Austric) claimed by 6.5 million speakers. Two Indo-Aryan languages particularly mark a significant growth during the 1991-2001 decade: Khandeshi in Maharashtra by 113 percent, and Bhili, covering the vast central region, by 72 percent.

In addition, there are as many as 30 languages spoken by populations between one hundred thousand and one

million each: 18 Tibeto-Burman languages, 7 Dravidian languages, 4 Austric languages and one Indo-Aryan language (Category B). A significant growth is noticed in the claims of the following languages during the decade: Malto and Coorgi (both Dravidian) by 108 and 71 percent respectively and Lotha, Phom, Konyak and Thado (all Tibeto-Chinese) by 98, 87, 80 and 76 percent, respectively. Austric languages reflect a slower growth during the decade – Munda and Kharia show growth of 10 and 6 percent respectively.

One notices a significant decline in the claims of a few other languages as well during the decade: Khond and Kisan (both Dravidian), show a decline of -46 and -13 percent respectively; Sema (Tibeto-Chinese) of -38 percent; and Savara (Austric) of -8 percent.

The remaining 56 languages of a total of 95 languages listed in the 2001 Census are spoken by the populations of 10-100 thousand each: 47 Tibeto-Burman, 6 Austric, and 3 Dravidian. A bulk of 'other languages' population, over two million in 2001 Census, comprises of such languages that are claimed by less than one hundred thousand speakers each. It is assumed that most of these languages belong to the tribal category.

Table 5: Decadal Growth of Prominent Tribal Languages, 1981-2001

Languages	2001 (millions)	Growth Percent 1991-2001	1991 (millions)	1981 (millions)	Growth Percent 1981-1991
Category A					
Bhili, Indo-Aryan	9.58	72	5.57	4.45	25
Santali, Austric	6.47	24	5.22	4.21	23
Gondi, Dravidian	2.71	28	2.12	1.96	9
Khandeshi, Indo-Aryan	2.08	113	0.97	0.45 *	117
Kurukh, Dravidian	1.75	23	1.43	1.27	13
Bodo, Tibeto-Burman	1.35	11	1.22	0.86	43
Khasi, Austric	1.13	24	0.91	0.63	44
Mundari, Austric	1.06	23	0.86	0.75	14
Ho, Austric	1.04	10	0.95	0.80	18
Total (A)	27.17 m.	-	19.25 m.	15.38 m.	-
Category B	(thousands)	(Percent)	(thousands)	(thousands)	(Percent)
(i) Tibeto-Burman					
Garó	889	32	676	408	66
Tripurí	854	23	695	491	42
Lushai/Mizo	675	25	539	385	40
Miri/Mishing	551	41	391	239 *	66
Mikir/Karbi	420	15	366	257*	42
Ao	261	52	172	106	64
Konyak	248	80	138	83	66
Dafla (Nissi)	211	22	174	140	24
Abor (Adi)	198	25	158	120	32
Thado	191	76	108	59	80
Lotha	170	98	86	58	-
Rabha	165	18	139	59	133

Tangkhul	142	39	102	79	29
Angami	132	35	98	42	-
Phom	123	87	65	24	-
Dimasa	112	26	89	-	-
Ladakhi	105	-	-	72	-
Sema	104	(-)38	166	94	77
Total	5,551	-	4,162	2,716	-
(ii) Dravidian					
Kui	916	43	642	508	26
Koya	362	34	271	242	12
Malto	225	108	108	95	14
Coorgi(Kodagu)	166	71	97	93	-
Kisan	141	(-)13	162	155	45
Kolami	122	24	98	84	-
Khond	119	(-)46	221	204	8
Total	2,051	-	1,599	1,381	-
(iii) Austric					
Korku	574	23	466	363	28
Munda	469	10	414	349	19
Savara	253	(-)8	273	235	16
Kharia	240	6	226	198	14
Total	1,536	-	1,379	1,145	-
iv) Indo-Aryan					
Halabi**	593	11	534	525	-
TOTAL(b)	9,731	-	7,674	5,777	-

* Figures of Bodo, Mikir, Miri and Khandeshi languages speakers are based on the projected estimates as per the growth rate registered during the decade 1961-71.

** The 1961 Census recorded Halabi as a dialect of Marathi. From 1971 onwards, it has been accorded an independent status.

Tribal Populations

Most of the tribal populations, with the exception of the North-East region, Dadra Nagar Haveli in the west and Lakshadweep in the south, live amidst a vast ocean of non-

tribal populations. Over 370 tribal communities, big and small, have been grouped in five regions on the basis of the pattern of their concentration and spread in the country:

1. Centre-west: Nearly half of the tribal population (42.2 million in 2001) is concentrated in the centre-west region in six states – Chhatisgarh, Madhya Pradesh, Rajasthan, Gujarat and Maharashtra and two Union Territories – Daman & Diu and Dadra Nagar Haveli. There are altogether eighty five tribal groups. The major Bhil tribe along with many other small groups belongs to the Indo-Aryan family and the other prominent tribe, Gondi is of Dravidian origin. The region occupies the picturesque ‘Gondwana’ in central India (extending southwards to Andhra Pradesh), and the ‘Bhilbhoomi’ with forest surroundings in the Aravalli Hills in the north-west touching the western coast.
2. Centre-east: About ninety groups, comprising 24 percent of the total tribal population (of 20.6 million, 2001), are concentrated in this region across five states – Orissa, Jharkhand, Bihar, West Bengal and Sikkim and the Union Territory of Andaman & Nicobar Islands. The central belt consists of plateaus and the mountainous region between the Indo-Gangetic plains and the Bastar hilly terrain. Sikkim is in the sub-Himalayan range and Andaman & Nicobar Islands lies deep in the south-east in the Indian Ocean. Almost all groups in this region belong to either the Austric or the Dravidian family, except for Bhutia, Lepcha, and Mech in Sikkim and West Bengal that belong to the Tibeto-Burman family.
3. North-East: Over 12 percent of the tribal population is concentrated in the North-east region, known as the seven sisters – Assam, Meghalaya, Mizoram, Nagaland, Manipur, Tripura and Arunachal Pradesh. The region consists of mountains and valleys on the eastern frontier

merging imperceptibly with those of Burma in the south-east. It comprises nearly seventy Scheduled Tribes (10.6 million, 2001 Census). All tribal groups here are largely of Tibeto-Burman origin, except for the Khasis in Meghalaya who belong to the Mon-Khmer group of Austric family and a small number of migrant communities in the plantations of the neighbouring region of Jharkhand, Bihar and West Bengal.

4. South: Over 11 percent of the tribal population is concentrated in four southern states – Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka, Tamil Nadu and Kerala and the Union Territory of Lakshadweep in the Arabian Sea. It comprises over one hundred tribes with a population of 9.6 million (2001 Census). Most of these groups belong to the Dravidian family while a few are traced to the Indo-Aryan and Austric origin. Many groups spill over to the south of Orissa and Madhya Pradesh and to eastern Maharashtra. The southern tract across the river Krishna stretches from Western Ghats in southern Kanara across Coorg Hills upto Kanyakumari.
5. North: This region represents merely two percent of the tribal population comprising 1.7 million (2001 Census). Approximately twenty tribal groups are related to the Bhotia group of Tibeto-Burman family, spread in the West-central sub-Himalayan range of Jammu & Kashmir, Himachal Pradesh, Uttarakhand (listed as 'Uttaranchal' in the Census) and Uttar Pradesh.

State-wise dispersal of tribal groups as per decadal Censuses of 1981, 1991 and 2001 is given in Table 6. Taking into account the strength of population ratios in different states and Union Territories, three major configurations emerge on the socio-political scene that seem to have a significant bearing on the democratisation processes in the country:

1. There are six tribal 'majority' units in four states and two Union Territories where tribal communities comprise the dominant population, in all 5.5 million in the 2001 Census, ranging between 60-95 percent.
2. There are seventeen units with a sizeable concentration of Scheduled Tribes (based on Table 6 C):
 - (i) In eleven states and one Union Territory, Daman & Diu: ranging between 10-40 percent, tribal population is 55.1 million, and
 - (ii) In four states and one Union Territory, Andaman & Nicobar Islands: ranging between 5-9 percent, Andaman & Nicobar Islands, comprise tribal population upto 21.5 million.
3. Seven states have a small proportion of Scheduled Tribes (less than 1 to 4 percent), the tribal population being 2.4 million in 2001.

**Table 6: Schedule Tribes Populations:
Statewise, 1981-2001 (thousands)**

States	Total population	Tribal population						Vacillation during 1981-2001
	2001	2001		1991		1981		
		percent	percent		percent		percent	percent
India	1,028,610	86,540	8.4	64,880	7.95	53,820	7.9	+0.5
6A. Tribal Dominant States:								
Lakshadweep (UT)	61	60	94.51	50	93.2	40	93.8	+0.7
Mizoram	889	840	94.46	650	94.8	460	93.6	+0.9
Nagaland	1,990	1,770	89.2	1,060	87.7	650	84.0	+5.2
Meghalaya	2,319	1,990	85.9	1,520	85.5	1,080	80.6	+5.3
Arunachal Pradesh	1,098	710	64.2	550	63.7	440	69.8	-5.6
Dadara Nagar Haveli (UT)	220	140	62.4	110	79.0	10	78.8	-16.4
Total	6,577	5510	-	-	-	-	-	-

6B. States with Sizeable Concentration of Scheduled Tribes								
(i)								
Manipur	2,400*	960	40.0	630	34.4	390	27.3	+12.7
Chhatisgarh	20,834	6,620	31.8	(a part of Madhya Pradesh)				
Tripura	3,199	970	31.1	850	31.0	580	28.4	+2.7
Jharkhand	26,946	7,090	26.3	(a part of Bihar)				
Orissa	36,805	8,150	22.1	7,030	22.2	5,920	22.4	-0.3
Sikkim	541	110	20.6	90	22.4	70	23.3	-2.7
Madhya Pradesh	60,348	12,230	20.3	15,400	23.3	11,990	23.0	-2.3
Gujarat	50,671	7,480	14.8	6,160	14.9	4,850	14.2	+0.6
Rajasthan	56,507	7,100	12.6	5,470	12.4	4,180	12.2	+0.4
Assam	26,656	3,310	12.4	2,870	12.8	2,190	11.0	+1.4
Daman & Diu (UT)	158	N.A.	-	120	11.5		12.7	-
Jammu & Kashmir	10,144	1,110	10.9	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	N.A.	-
Total	2,95,209	55,130						
(ii)								
Maharashtra	96,879	8,580	8.9	7,320	9.3	5,770	9.2	-0.3
Andaman & Nicobar (UT)	356	30	8.3	30	9.5	20	11.9	-3.6
Andhra Pradesh	76,210	5,020	6.6	4,200	6.3	3,180	5.9	+0.7
Karnataka	52,851	3,460	6.6	1,920	4.3	1,830	4.9	+2.7
West Bengal	80,176	4,410	5.5	3,810	5.6	3,070	5.6	-0.1
Total	3,06,472	21,500	-	-	-	-	-	-
6C. States with a small proportion of Scheduled Tribes								
Himachal Pradesh	6,078	240	4.0	220	4.2	20	4.6	-0.6
Uttaranchal (Uttarakhand)	8,489	260	3.02	(A part of Uttar Pradesh)			0.02	-
Kerala	31,841	360	1.1	320	1.1	260	1.0	+0.1
Tamil Nadu	62,406	650	1.04	570	1.0	520	1.1	-0.06
Bihar	82,999	760	0.9	6,620	7.7	5,810	8.3	-7.4
Uttar Pradesh	1,66,198	110	0.06	290	0.2	20	0.2	-0.14
Goa	1,348	(566)	0.04	(376)	0.03	12	0.07	-0.03
TOTAL	3,59,359	2,381	-	-	-	-	-	-
6D. States not notifying Scheduled Tribes								
Punjab	24,359	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Haryana	21,145	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Delhi (UT)	13,851	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chandigarh (UT)	901	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
Pondicherry (UT)	974	-	-	-	-	-	-	-
TOTAL	61,230	-	-	-	-	-	-	-

(* Estimated)

Reviewing the language scene over the past three decades between 1981-2001, one notices many tribal groups as showing an intense degree of self-assertion, laying claim to a higher growth rate in successive Censuses since 1931 (cf. Table 11, Khubchandani 1992a). As an exception, a few communities show a slower rate of growth or an actual decline in their populations. It is evident that the post-Independence safeguards enshrined in the Indian Constitution have served as a strong impetus for assertion of the tribal identity.

The Table above reveals that there has been a significant vacillation in population growth among several states between 1981 and 2001. The earlier decade 1971-81 was also marked by growth of tribal population that showed an increase of 41.8 percent against the all-India growth rate of 24.7 percent. The decade 1961-71 records a slower growth rate, an increase of 21.85 percent in the tribal population against the all-India growth rate of 24.8 percent. During the past three decades the tribal component in the country's total population has increased from 6.8 percent in 1971 to 8.4 percent in 2001.

The North-East region shows a strong phenomenon of assertion of tribal identity: Manipur +12.7 percent, Meghalaya +5.3 percent, Nagaland +4.8 percent and Tripura + 2.7 percent (a few characteristics of the socio-political milieu in the region are discussed in Chapter 4).

A sudden rise in the growth rates of Karnataka and Maharashtra during the past three decades is attributed to the removal of area restrictions in respect of many Scheduled Tribes notified through the Parliament Amendment Act of 1976.

Bihar and Madhya Pradesh register a significant drop in the proportion of tribals in the 2001 Census due to the separation of Jharkhand from Bihar and of Chhatisgarh

from Madhya Pradesh in 1993. Growth of tribal population has been at a slower pace in Himachal Pradesh, Sikkim and Andaman & Nicobar Islands due to assimilatory trends. In many states, variations within plus/minus one percent can be attributed to the vagaries in Census elicitation and tabulation (cf. Khubchandani 1983).

Group Dynamics

Demographic factors have, to a large extent, affected the functional load of tribal languages in different regions. In 1991, only 41.3 percent tribals recorded maintaining a distinct language as a mark of their identity, sliding down from 49 percent in 1971 (cf. Table 4). A large section of tribals tend to switch over to surrounding non-tribal languages as their mother tongue, or retain both languages (ancestral and non-tribal) in the home environment. The characteristic of maintaining two mother tongues is a notable feature of plurilingual India (Khubchandani 1983); however, periodic Census elicitation is not equipped to capture this ground reality. On the basis of mother tongue claims, one can identify two broad kinds of tribal groups:

- I. Groups claiming an overwhelming allegiance (above 80 percent) to one mother tongue are termed as *homogeneous* tribes. These are further distinguished as:
 1. those affiliated to ancestral mother tongue and
 2. those who have switched over to a non-tribal mother tongue
- II. Groups segmented among more than one mother tongues (at least 20 percent members of the tribe claiming different mother tongues) are termed as *composite* tribes. These may be further distinguished as:
 1. those sharing two or more tribal languages as the mother tongue and

2. those sharing assimilatory trends towards non-tribal languages. These are again divided into:
 - (i) majority claims still favour maintaining the ancestral mother tongue, or
 - (ii) majority claims favour shift to a non-tribal mother tongue.

In terms of group dynamics, many big or small communities adopt different organisational strategies to maintain their identity. The trends of assertion or assimilation among different tribal groups, to a large extent, depend on the socio-economic functions a group performs in a cultural milieu (with its specific worldview). Roy Burman (1966) discusses the characteristics of *dominant*, *satellite*, and *allied* communities which relate themselves to different groups in a region on the basis of ritualistic and/or political segmentation such as:

1. In the Kohima district of Nagaland, the Angamis constitute the dominant community and Zeliangs are accepted as a satellite community.
2. In the Gond area of Madhya Pradesh, Pradhans are ritually associated with Gonds as minstrels, constituting an allied community
3. The Mizo term for allied communities is *Awzia* which includes groups like Ralte, Pawi, Lakher and Paite (Goswami 1975, 1983).

In multicultural settings there are instances when certain groups play the role of *bridge* communities (such as Totos living on the border of West Bengal and Bhutan act as a liaison between Bhutias and Kochs), or of *buffer* communities, serving as a kind of link between two or more aggressive communities (such as Kukis between the Mizos and the Nagas on the Manipur-Mizoram border). "This sort of structural arrangement allowed the Kukis to have fringe

identification or conflict with the dominant aggressive group in contact, while the core remained free to serve as shock absorber" (Roy Burman *op. cit.*).

The nature of segmentation can provide useful clues to the 'bridge' or 'buffer' roles of certain tribes in a plurilingual milieu. As an illustration, the Oraons of Dravidian origin in Bihar and West Bengal show preference for the ancestral language (Kurukh) and the 'tribal' vernacular (Sadani), along with reflecting assimilating trends towards the regional languages, Hindi and Bengali. In Orissa, the Oraon community shows preference for the non-tribal mother tongues (Oriya 44 percent and Laria 12 percent), whereas in Madhya Pradesh, they show a definite preference to retain their ancestral language.

As discussed earlier, a large section of tribals particularly in the central belt is interspersed with vast non-tribal populations. Hence, tribal languages in this region are charged with the minimum functional load and are restricted largely to domestic and cultural domains serving primarily as a mark of *group identity*. These languages, thus, are open to the pressures of assimilation from major regional languages. Various modernisation processes have accelerated the pace of assimilation: it reflects the ratio of non-tribal mother tongue claims increasing from 51 percent in 1971 to 58 percent in 1981, it maintains the same ratio in 1991.

The 1961 and 1971 Censuses register 12 percent tribals (nearly 4.7 million), retaining certain hybrid varieties, with Indo-Aryan or Dravidian base as their mother tongue. The 1961 Census records over 30 such distinct 'tribal' vernaculars; 20 of them are spoken by more than ten thousand speakers each. A bulk of them belong to Indo-Aryan language family (95 percent), and remaining (5

percent) to Dravidian language family (cf. Table 14, in Khubchandani 1992a):

1. Sadan/Sadri, Khortha in Jharkhand; based on Bihari Hindi (Magahi)
2. Lamani, Banjari in Andhra Pradesh, Maharashtra, Karnataka; based on Rajasthani Hindi
3. Laria, Baigani in Madhya Pradesh, Orissa; based on Chhatisgarhi Hindi
4. Kamari, Katakari, Kathori, Koli in Madhya Pradesh, Maharashtra, Gujarat, Dadra Nagar Haveli; based on Marathi.
5. Bhatari in Orissa; based on Oriya
6. Malpahariya, Chakma, Haijong in West Bengal and the North-East region; based on Bengali
7. Vadari, Chenchu in Maharashtra, Karnataka, Andhra Pradesh; based on Telugu
8. Badaga, Kurumba, Soliga in southern states; based on Kannada
9. Yerukula, Irula in Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu; based on Tamil
10. Yerava, Pania, in Karanataka, Kerala; based on Malayalam.

In this context, *vitality* indices of different languages are worked out on the scale indicating the intensity of retention of an ancestral language in relation to the strength of the tribe by the same/similar name. Table 7 indicates the degree of assertion of certain languages as per the language claims in the 1991 Census:

Table 7: Assertion of Tribal Languages: 1991-2001

Tribal Groups	Population: 1991	Language Claims: 1991		Language Claims 2001 Growth during 1991-2001	
	thousand	thousand	Percent to Population	thousand	Percent
Tripuri, Tibeto-Burman	462	695	150	854	23
Mikir/Karbi, Tibeto-Burman	286	366	128	420	15
Garó, Tibeto-Burman	547	676	124	889	32
Mizo/Lushai, Tibeto-Burman	500	539	108	675	25
Sugali / Lamani, Indo-Aryan	1,135	1,203*	106	2,869	-
Khasi, Austric	870	912	105	1,129	24
Santali, Austric	4,977	5,216	105	6,470	24
Ho, Austric	1,036	949	92	1,043	10
Miri, Tibeto-Burman	468	391	84	551	41
Bodo, Tibeto-Burman	1,805	1,222	68	1,350	11
Oraon/ Kurukh, Dravidian	2,197	1,427	65	1,751	23
Saora/ Savara, Austric	424	273	65	253	(-) 8
Bhil/ Bhilodi, Indo-Aryan	9,726	5,572	57	9,583	72
Rabha, Tibeto-Burman	262	139	47	165	18
Munda, Austric	1,202	861	34	1,061	23
Gond, Dravidian	9,208	2,125	23	2,714	28
Khond, Dravidian	1,140	221	19	119	(-) 46

(* Lamani language figures from 1971 Census.)

At one end of the scale, there are languages whose mother tongue speakers exceed the strength of the tribe bearing the same name. These languages are marked by a greater intensity of functions, qualifying for the role of somewhat 'localised' contact languages in respective regions. Many languages of the North-East namely, Tripuri, Mikir, Garo, Lushai, Khasi; Santali in the Centre-West; and Sugali (Lamani) in the South, come under this category. Notably, the claims of Lamani, a 'tribal' vernacular, are nine-fold higher than the Sugali and Andh tribes in Andhra Pradesh. Similarly, Chakma, Haijong (tribal varieties of Bengali) and Bhatari (a variety of Oriya) also record exceptional growth.

Another category of tribal languages records a high degree of maintenance namely, Bhili in the Centre-West, Kurukh in the Centre-East and Bodo and Miri in the North-East. A few languages show feeble signs of assimilation with modest growth rates, namely Gondi, Khond, Munda and Bhumij.

The study makes it evident that tribal consciousness has been acquiring a sharp edge over the past few decades. It will, therefore, be prudent to utilise this consciousness by extending and creating avenues of participation among tribals through which all that is best in the tribal society, culture, language and art can be preserved, strengthened and developed.

An amalgamative approach to diversity is marked by language harmony built through a respect for liaison among speech communities. It is manifested by 'open-ended' transfer of words and phrases from other languages – a sort of 'transient' adaptation process called relexification (with *tatsama* and *tadbhava* borrowings as a characteristic of re-Sanskritisation, cf. Khubchandani 1992b, 2003c).

The multiplicity of languages if handled with proper sensitivity can lead to cohesion instead of friction, as has

been the bane of language politics in the contemporary milieu of South Asia.

Language Enquiry

Under the influence of purists' tradition in philology and in pedagogy, agencies concerned with social planning analyse linguistic heterogeneity as a serious problem of human adjustment (as embodied in the myth 'Tower of Babel'). In recent years, there has been more of a lip service to language pluralism as "mainstream linguistics is still squeamish about hybrid languages that show considerable mixing" (Canagarajah 2005: 17). In the West, nations have been legitimised on the basis of *single* language, under the doctrine "one nation, one language". With such unilingual perspective there has been a traditional bias that language diversity is a problem (Graddol 1997). Constituting the mother tongue as a cult and a marker of identity, many linguists and language agencies since the European Renaissance have joined national chauvinists in isolating bilinguals as being rootless and having dubious loyalty to the nation (Lo Bianco 2005).

During the post-colonial phase language planning programmes in developing countries have, by and large, been ideology-driven and elite-sponsored. These efforts tend to make language identity, hitherto a *cultural* trait, more *political*. An implicit consensus over *stratificational* hierarchy of language use in traditional societies is giving way to a plethora of explicit corporate provisions of *legislative* hierarchy – such as languages scheduled in the Indian Constitution, state languages, national languages, official or 'associate' official languages, termed as 'language engineering' in the context of contemporary Indian scene (cf. Khubchandani 1999b). These developments have resulted into a radical shift in language identity, an upsurge away

from a low-key *instrumental* role to the top-gear *defining* characteristic in the new emerging order of pluralism.

The phenomenon of language undergoing change along with usage, a characteristic of open systems, has in a way, rescued it from restrictive parameters and techniques of logical formalisation. Effects of a *non-linear* discourse in advertising are grasped from the proportion of its constituents, a harmonious blending of parts forming a *balanced* whole (cf. the theory of *sphota*, Chapter 3).

Making out a strong case for 'multilingual /multicultural awareness', Whorf, a neo-Herderian champion in the early twentieth century, pleads for a world "in which 'little peoples' and 'little languages' would not only be respected but valued" (cited in Fishman 1982). In Steiner's view, a mathematical 'universalist' model of language is bound to fail to account for the nature of relations between languages (or speech varieties) as they actually exist and differ; thus rejecting a theory of *language* in favour of a theory of *languages*:

A genuine philosophy of language must grapple with the phenomenon and rationale of the human 'invention' and retention of anywhere between five and ten thousand distinct tongues (1975).

In this context, we should take a serious note of Haugen's observations in his pioneering study:

The concept of language as a rigid, monolithic structure is false, even if it has proved to be a useful fiction in the development of linguistics.

It is the kind of simplification that is necessary at a certain stage of a science, but which can now be replaced by more sophisticated models (1972).

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